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**“No Happy Woman Writes”: An Analysis of Novels of Seduction
and Domestic Fiction in Early American Literature**

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Submitted in Partial Completion of the
Requirements for Departmental Honors in English

Bridgewater State University

December 20, 2018

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Introduction

History and Perspective of Early American Women Writers:

American novelists writing in the new Republic contributed to a collective cultural effort to create a new written voice. Writers in the new nation aimed to develop a style of writing distinct from the contemporary European conventions, one that would reflect American ideals and society. Though increasing in popularity during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, novels and fictional works received an inauspicious stigma that marked the works, authors, and often even readers of the genre. Twentieth-century scholars of the early American novel denounced the genre as simply melodramatic romantic work that would not improve the intellect of the new Republic. Because of this assumption, which I argue is false, the early American women novelists have been largely ignored by scholars in American literary studies. Revisiting these novels which were overlooked for most of the 20th century, specifically novels of seduction and domestic fiction, allows for a rejoinder to this dismissive argument. These novelists not only contributed to forming a new *American* voice, but revised femininity in the changing Republic through subtle yet complex portrayals of American women in a changing society. An exploration of the position of female voice and the communication among characters in early American novels both illustrates the shared experience of womanhood in the founding nation, and reveals these authors questioning the limited mobility caused by the social constructs of the time.

Historical context – particularly an understanding of the readers of these novels and their social situations – allows the reader to fully appreciate the richness and complexity of these

novels. Young women in early America were not encouraged to read novels. According to Linda Kerber, “Novels celebrated passion; they suggested that women were well guided by their own emotions. They encouraged people to break out of socially accepted roles, roles thought to be guided by reason” (245). Novels illustrated behavior and imagination that were considered dangerous in the Republic. In many of the novels that I discuss, that danger is merely a wider scope for women’s freedom and selfhood. Eighteenth and early nineteenth-century critics believed fictional works discouraged women from becoming more involved with the intellectual life of the Republic, while non-fiction did not. Women were encouraged to read history instead because “it promised learning, but not too much learning ... serious mental exercise was thought to be literally dangerous to women” (Kerber 247). History was thought to be safe for Republican women to read because it was based on fact, it did not support the notion that women should trust their passion, and thus was not a waste of time as was the risqué novel reading.

Readers of both novels of seduction and domestic fiction, the two genres that I explore in this essay, were predominately young women. Due to the high mortality rate during the Revolutionary War, two-thirds of the white population was under the age of twenty four. An increased attention to childhood education during the late eighteenth century also aided in creating a market of potential readers for the early American writer (Davidson, *Revolution* 188). Because of this available audience of readers, novelists wrote of circumstances relatable to young women. Novels like Susanna Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple*, or Hannah Webster Foster’s *The Coquette*, both novels of seduction, are didactic tales of unsuitable and unsatisfying marriage. Writing forty years later, Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s domestic novel *Hope Leslie* moves away from those more didactic narratives, and suggests an alternative idea of self-perception for women in both colonial America and in the nineteenth century.

Cultural leaders in early America were extremely concerned with the political status of women, their education, and the societal role that circumscribed their freedoms in the domestic sphere. This political attention and concern with female roles would later be titled the “woman question” (Davidson, *Revolution* 24). Historians have discussed two ruling conversations regarding the woman question. The eighteenth century writer and philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau argued for the innate inferiority of women, and for the necessity of female subordination in *Emile*, a popular book among early Americans. According to Cathy Davidson, “Rousseau even maintained that education destroyed a woman’s natural charm and equable disposition, thereby rendering her unfit to fulfill her chief function of happily bringing happiness to others” (Davidson, *Revolution* 25). Two other writers that were equally conservative, misogynistic, and also widely read in the Republic, were Reverend James Fordyce and Dr. John Gregory. Fordyce, known for *Sermons to Young Women* (1765), popularized the view that a woman’s most important role was to serve and please her husband. Dr. Gregory wrote of distinctly unfeminine traits in *The Father’s Legacy to his Daughters* (1774). Traits of vitality and self-governing were unattractive when possessed by women, suggesting that submissiveness would be a better trait for women, or future wives (Davidson, *Revolution* 25).

While many conservative views toward women dominated the early Republic, there were other members of the founding nation that advocated for women’s rights and female education. Thomas Paine, one of America’s founding fathers, argued for women’s political and social freedom. Benjamin Franklin also advocated for women’s rights and female education. American writer Judith Sargent Murray argued for equality among the sexes in much of her writing. Abigail Adams famously wrote to her husband while drafting the Constitution: “Remember the Ladies, and be more generous and favorable to them than your ancestors. Do not put such

unlimited power into the hands of the Husbands. Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could” (Davidson, *Revolution* 185). John Adams left her request unfulfilled, but she continued to argue for the importance of female education and the rejection of the common ridicule that accompanied female learning. In England, Mary Wollstonecraft, a notable writer and advocate for equality among the sexes, published *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) which contributed to the equalitarian argument in the new Republic (Davidson, *Revolution* 210). Her ideas of equality and female freedom were considered to be radical, therefore her work was well read, but not always well received in the new nation.

Like the two ruling views regarding both the social and political roles of women in the Republic, novels in some cases portrayed the conservative constructs of the Republic, while others regarded those ideologies as destructive to the founding nation. The novels that I discuss appear to both support the social constructs of early America concerning gender and women’s roles, while at the same time they identify and address the dangerous impact of those ideologies. Restricting women from reading their shared experiences, proposing that reading history be a more beneficial choice for learning, is just the beginning of the circumscribed female freedom prominent in the founding nation. As literary scholar Caroline Kerber writes, “The early Republic does look different when seen through women’s eyes” (Kerber xi). These authors write of shared emotional struggles, presenting a rich illustration of womanhood in the founding nation.

Because of this social climate, early American women writers, especially novelists, faced a monumental challenge when writing and publishing their work. More than 50 years after the publication of *Charlotte Temple*, American columnist and novelist Sara Parton (known by her pseudonym Fanny Fern) advises in her novel *Ruth Hall* (1854) “No happy woman ever writes”

(Kelley 138). A happy woman in the Republic, and well into the 19th and 20th centuries, was a married woman who was financially supported by her husband. Women's primary role was focused on domesticity—maintaining a home and caring for children. Even women who were independently employed commonly worked as servants in the homes of others (Kelley 144). The women writers, or “literary domestics” as coined by Kelley, that I discuss in this essay daringly joined a male dominated profession, making an income of their own through writing. Mary Kelley describes the complexity of these situations in *Private Woman Public Stage*. She writes: “Even to make money, needed or not, was to jostle their female consciousness with male preoccupations. To justify their pursuit of literary income simply as the right of any individual was neither easy nor likely for them” (146). To situate the novelists and their work in the social climate of their time is to understand the challenges they faced in merely sharing their stories. Hannah Webster Foster, Susana Rowson, and Catharine Maria Sedgwick, collectively refused to be silent, sharing stories of womanhood in a changing Republic. These writers discuss, thoughtfully, the condition of the nation, and the condition for women, and in that way have shaped a part of American culture, the culture of domesticity previously ignored.

20th and 21st Century Scholarship:

Though the early American novel—beginning with the work of Charles Brockden Brown—received significant critical attention during the twentieth century, novels written by women did not receive the same response. Widely neglected or dismissed for much of the 20th century, early American novels written by women, their relationship with the founding nation and their reflection of the political climate received increased critical attention beginning with

the rise of Women's and Feminist Studies in the 1980s. All of the scholars that I discuss in this essay work toward a similar goal of expanding the study of American literature from the small group of texts that had dominated the field of American literary studies. Doing so allows for a wider and more inclusive understanding of the roots of American literature. These scholars do not claim that the early American novels are works of monumental complexity. As Cathy Davidson explains, "this is not to say that the first American fictionalists are yet undiscovered Melvilles. The novels of the early national period deserve examination not because they are hitherto unappreciated literary masterpieces but because they mark the beginning of a tradition" ("Flirting with Destiny" 19).

Cathy Davidson's *Revolution and the Word* (1986) is one of the first theoretical analyses of the early American novel. Since first publication, Davidson has revisited the culmination of the first decade of her academic career to create an expanded edition which she published in 2004. Her extended analysis of the early American novel aims to refute the two ruling views that dominated the field previously. Contradictory to one another, the two assumptions about early American fiction suggests that it was either nonexistent, or that novels published in the early Republic were mere imitations of Anglo-European fiction. Noticing that most survey courses and anthologies of American fiction begin with James Fenimore Cooper or Charles Brockden Brown, neglecting the women writing before them, Davidson focused her research on some of the hundred novels that were published between 1789 and 1820.

To refute the common claim that American fiction was imitative of British and European traditions, Davidson argues that the early American novelists aimed to create a distinctive voice despite the dominant European style. Though American novelists often borrowed plots as a structure with which to build their own adaptations, they distinguished themselves from their

counterparts by focusing on American culture, conflict, and politics. To support this argument for originality in early American fiction, Davidson notes that “novels tended to exemplify a range of energies and impulses expressed throughout the early national period but that did not survive in the final document ratified as the U.S. Constitution—including a political role for women” (5). Novels therefore explored the potential for women neglected in the founding documents.

Nina Baym, another prominent scholar in the field of early American literature, focuses heavily on the history of American women writers and the political atmosphere of the time in which they’re writing. In her work *American Woman Writers and the Work of History 1790-1860* (1995) Baym explores the historical writing of over 150 women authors writing before the Civil War, many which have not been discussed in literary scholarship before. Specifically, Baym reads the overlooked work of female writers with attention to the nationalist narratives that discuss diverse topics. Not only acknowledging the works of women writers, but arguing for the formation of female selfhood within the works, Baym writes:

If women were not yet to be legislators, judges, cabinet members, or presidents of the nation—if they were not even to demand the right to vote for these officers until around the middle of the nineteenth century—nevertheless their writing shows that they thought of themselves as part of the non official public sphere and intended to make themselves influential in forming public opinion, whether as writers or mothers or spouses or all of these. (6)

Here Baym writes of the authors’ intent when publishing didactic novels, short stories, and poetry in a nation that limited their social mobility. Baym focuses on a much larger scope of literature, arguing that this unrecognized work is an unrecognized element of the formation of

American literature. However, we both aim to discover what the author is illustrating about women's social and political freedom, or lack of, in the new nation.

In "Melodramas of Beset Manhood" (1981) Baym attempts to explain why and how these women writers have been excluded from literary conversations and scholarship. Specifically, Baym acknowledges the exclusion of these works from the canon of American literature. She concludes that there are three main reasons for the neglect of active women writers in scholarship. First, the bias of contemporary scholarship which simply denied women's ability to write well would exclude women's literature from being discussed. A second possibility for this inattention is that women had not written texts that were considered to be of literary excellence. Rather, women in the founding nation wrote with professionalism, but not artistry. Baym's third reason pertains to the critical theories that were founded later. When referring to works of early America, these theories would mainly refer to the "most American" work rather than the best. These theorists also believed that to be American literature, it had to be completely original and monumental like the new nation, which successfully refuses the stories of womanhood and portrayals of domestic, everyday life.

Historian Mary Kelley aims to understand the literary domestics through their stories. In *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America* (1984) Kelley joins women's public prose with their private letters to reconstruct the lives of female writers in a new way. In order to present a clearer understanding of a contradictory and conflicting time in American history, she explores the anonymous writers' path to becoming public figures, one achieved through writing. Jane Tompkins, like Kelley, attempts to establish a positive conversation around these works and understand what made these novels recognizable by their original readers and neglected later on. In *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of*

American Fiction 1790-1860 (1985) Tompkins studies the conventional elements of early American novels, not what sets them apart. Exploring what these texts have in common with one another allows for Tompkins to form an argument regarding the “cultural self-definition” of the new nation (xvi). Tompkins focuses specifically on the sentimental novel explaining the necessity for sentimental plot lines and characterization to capture a reactive reader. Tompkins argues that the early sentimental novel was successful in awakening a society to their own self perception of American culture. Arguing for the conventional characteristics of this genre supports her argument for revisiting these overlooked and understudied works.

More recent scholarship has continued to revisit the early American novelists, striving to understand the complexity within the texts of post Revolutionary America. Sharon M. Harris, author of *Redefining the Political Novel* (1995), focuses on the connection between the social and political. Revisiting the early American women writers, Harris explores the social consequences of political processes and events as illustrated in the early American novel. Through women’s writing she explores the debate on resisting authority, one central to the post Revolutionary period. Employing a feminist critical approach, as the majority of these scholars do, Harris claims that these literary traditions have a role in forming postmodern feminism. Although postmodern feminists have depreciated the women’s literary tradition for the constructs which the writers seem to support—the norms of a patriarchal society, Harris acknowledges the connection between the past literature and current progress.

Since scholars have revisited the literary domestics and their works, the field of criticism has grown to include a conversation about domestic fiction. Over the last thirty years scholars have founded what Mary Kelley termed “Sedgwick Studies” which regards Catharine Maria Sedgwick as more than a minor footnote but insists her work as worthy of the same attention

accorded to her canonized contemporaries like Cooper, Hawthorne, and Poe (xi). In response to this recent academic interest, The Sedgwick Society was founded in 1997 with the intent to “promote the study and awareness of Sedgwick’s life and works” (Anderson). *Catharine Maria Sedgwick*, a collection of critical perspectives published in 2003, includes current scholarship on Sedgwick Studies. Included in this collection is Judith Fetterley’s discussion of the rhetoric in *Hope Leslie*, Sedgwick’s best known novel. Other scholars like Robert Daly, Charlene Avallone, and Deborah Gussman discuss Sedgwick’s lesser known works. Approaching the once overlooked fictional writings with a new historicist approach has founded a new area of study in American literature.

Each of these literary scholars have helped shape my argument in the coming chapters. Understanding the political climate of the late nineteenth century, as Baym and Davidson do, is crucial to understanding the novels that I explore in this essay. As Davidson argues that novels of seduction deserve scholarly attention for the challenges expressed in their subtleness, I aim to discover and discuss the subtle disjunctions in the novels themselves, primarily focusing on Susanna Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple*, Hannah Webster Foster’s *The Coquette*, and Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie*. Specifically exploring the position of female voice in novels of seduction and domestic fiction allows for a comparison of the shared experience of womanhood and its limitations illustrated in women’s fictional writing over the three decades following the American Revolution.

My thesis begins with an analysis of Susanna Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple*, America’s first best selling novel in the Republic. The original publication in 1794 included the subtitle *A Tale of Truth*, perhaps Rowson’s attempt to make the novel more appealing to readers which were consistently advised to read nonfiction. Rowson witnessed the publication of forty-five

editions of *Charlotte* in her lifetime, contributing to over two hundred editions published to date. This work was read by both men and women of all classes in the eighteenth century. In addition to being a popular novelist, Rowson was a poet, playwright, actress, songwriter, and teacher. Though born in England, she is considered an American writer because she spent most of her childhood living in Nantucket. Rowson writes prolifically about American culture through fictional works (Davidson, *Charlotte* xix-xxxiii). Specifically, in *Charlotte Temple*, Rowson addresses many insecurities of the early Republic. In chapter one I argue that Rowson's didactic tale seeks to warn the reader about more than the dangers of seduction. Rather, Rowson uses her platform as an author to highlight the dangers that result from female voicelessness and undeveloped selfhood. *Charlotte* explores women's inability to reconcile mistakes in early America, mistakes that men are afforded with little criticism from society.

In chapter two I discuss another novel of seduction, Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette*. Hannah Webster Foster, a Massachusetts writer, based this novel on the true story of Elizabeth Whitman whose death in Danvers, Massachusetts received national attention. Again, writing of true events made the novel more appealing to an audience of readers that were discouraged from reading fictional works. Basing the novel on a true story of seduction also distanced Foster from accusations that she knew too much about the risqué topic. This novel both focuses on women's natural subservience and the rejection of it through characters like Eliza Wharton who are distanced from the traditional domestic role. Presenting a character who refuses the societal constructs of the new nation and the repercussions of that choice, Foster both highlights these norms and critiques their demands. Because of the novel's epistolary form, communication between characters is immensely important. This free exchange narration allows the reader direct access to characters' thoughts.

Chapter three includes an analysis of Catharine Maria Sedgwick's work of historical fiction, *Hope Leslie* (1827). The novel re-visions colonial America to address both the political and social issues happening long before American independence and in the time that she was writing, during the Jacksonian era. *Hope Leslie* lends voice to Native American characters to question the political complacency in nineteenth century America regarding Indian removal. I argue that Sedgwick presents portrays femininity differently than novels of seduction. Characters like Hope and Magawisca, who are radically self reliant, are supported in their continuous defiance against unjust authoritative figures. Rather than being rejected from society because of their pseudo masculine characteristics, these female characters are encouraged to foster them. In *Hope Leslie*, Sedgwick illustrates the selfhood that women in the early Republic and in the nineteenth century needed in order to argue for full citizenship years later.

The final chapter focuses on Catharine Maria Sedgwick's lesser-known novels. In this chapter I discuss three didactic tales: *Home: A Story of New England Life* (1835), *The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man* (1836), and *Live and Let Live: Domestic Service Illustrated* (1837). This trilogy was intended to teach a wide and popular audience. These novels vary in form and content from the historical fiction discussed in chapter three, but still offer a vision of womanhood in the Republic. Specifically, these novels address education, religion, politics and the role of the past all through a domestic lens. Sedgwick highlights how women's influence within the private domestic sphere shapes the larger public sphere. These novels do not present the same social critique as noted in her historical fiction. Rather, I argue these tales illustrate a "tempered progressivism" because Sedgwick does reject a return to pre-Revolutionary society, therefore insisting on progress. However, she limits the scope of female education to the domestic sphere, thus limiting women's roles to that private sphere. Each of these didactic tales

focuses on a different element of American society, collectively supporting the democratic values of the new nation.

Ch. I: *Charlotte Temple* and the Consequences of Voicelessness

Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*, published in 1794, was the first best-selling novel in the new nation. This novel received the attention of readers in the founding nation, but until recently it received scant scholarly attention. As scholar Cathy Davidson writes in the introduction of *Charlotte*: "Canonized, in effect, before the American canon was invented and then excluded from it in our own time, the novel still must be deemed one of the best-loved books in American literary history" (xi). Insisting on the importance of this early novel, Davidson's scholarship challenges the idea that sentimental novels were merely idealistic romantic works. Instead, Davidson and other scholars examine these novels as a reflection of the sociology and history of their times. Beginning my analysis of early American novels of seduction with Rowson's work allows for a review of the most popular work circulating in the early Republic. I argue that Rowson illustrates the dangers that result from a weak sense of selfhood through the characterization of Charlotte and her ineffectual agency.

As Rowson indicates by the inclusion of *A Tale of Truth* in the subtitle of the original publication, this best-seller is not solely a novel of seduction but is intended to reflect the "truth" of women's lives in the early Republic. Whether the novel reached the hands of "the young and thoughtless of the fair sex," "sober matrons," or "anxious parents," Rowson intended to teach the varying readers of deception, isolation, and their inevitable results (5-6). In addition to employing traditional literary devices such as a strong narrative voice, carefully constructed characterization, and a detailed plot structure to engage the reader's sentiment, Rowson uses communication as a pedagogical tool in the novel. Although characterized as a novel of seduction by eighteenth-century readers, *Charlotte's* lesson extends beyond the dangers of

seduction. *Charlotte Temple* is not simply an entertaining story of seduction, but a didactic tale of deception, mistrust, and weak selfhood.

My argument focuses on the relationship between Charlotte's use of voice – both spoken and written – throughout the novel in connection with her desire for agency in an environment that rejects just that. Fifteen year old Charlotte, living at a boarding school in England, is invited to accompany her teacher Mademoiselle La Rue on a night out with “men of fashion” (26). Convinced to attend for the first time by La Rue's deceit, Charlotte is “disappointed in the pleasure she had promised herself from this visit. The levity of the gentlemen and freedom of their conversation disgusted her... [Charlotte grew] thoughtful and uneasy, and heartily wished herself home again in her own chamber” (27). Here, Charlotte is making decisions for herself, even openly expressing moral judgement in response to the frivolous company of that night. Charlotte is introduced as a character with agency, able to make self-directed decisions.

However, Charlotte's foundational agency is lost as the novel continues and Charlotte forfeits her own self-governing sensibility. In regretting her time away with her wrongfully trusted teacher, Charlotte again places trust in La Rue when she receives a letter from her seducer Montraville. Charlotte, wary of Montraville's vapid character, initially refuses to read the letter but is convinced by La Rue to read and respond to his proposals. Although Charlotte believes that she should pass the letter along to her mother for review, she is persuaded by La Rue when she labels Charlotte an “unaccountable girl” (31). Ignoring her own sense of morality, Charlotte again succumbs to La Rue's manipulative guidance. To read this excerpt as merely a warning that young readers should abide by parents' rules would be to simplify, and misunderstand Rowson's intent. Rather, we should read Charlotte's choice through the lens of her father's story. Mr. Temple, like Charlotte, has rejected the guidance of his own parents, but

his defiance has resulted in a successful marriage. As a result of this subplot, the message to the reader (and to Charlotte) is muddled. Charlotte is chastised throughout the novel for her rejection of parental guidance, while her father's similar actions are not.

The novel reveals Charlotte's family history through the story of her parents' marriage. Charlotte's father, Mr. Temple, rejects his father's poor advice, and rather than marry Miss Weatherby, his father's choice, he insists on marrying Lucy Eldridge for love. Mr. Temple, in rejecting a marriage with financial prospects, marries Lucy to live a far less extravagant, but happy life. Charlotte's mother, Lucy, however, is far more dedicated to her family, their opinions, and her role in caring for them. When loyally visiting her father in prison every night, Lucy claims, "We are all the world to each other, I thank God, I have health and spirits to improve the talents with which nature has endowed me; and I trust if I employ them in the support of a beloved parent, I shall not be thought an unprofitable servant"(20). Lucy embodies the subservient female role of most early American women. Lucy supports her father and assesses her worth by her ability to serve him. Lucy's reality illustrates the reality of early American womanhood, which is valued primarily as it fulfills familial responsibilities. Both parents serve as models for Charlotte. However, instead of following her mother's example, Charlotte acts like her father when rejecting parental advice. In attempting to make self-directed decisions, Charlotte adheres to her father's modeled behavior, rather than her mother's. In doing so, Rowson suggests that Charlotte cannot imagine herself through her mother's story; she, disastrously, has to use her father's. She thus illustrates women's inability to find a sense of self in a society focused on women's silence and subservience.

Gradually, Charlotte loses both her father's self-directed decisiveness and her ability to use her own voice effectively. When Montraville proposes an elopement, Charlotte initially

refuses, knowing that her parents will disapprove of their union. Again, persuaded by the deceitful La Rue and Montraville himself, Charlotte reconsiders. After agreeing to journey abroad with these unfit characters, Charlotte receives a letter from her mother and is again conflicted by filial duty. Charlotte claims: “This letter has saved me: it has opened my eyes to the folly I was so near committing... I will not wound the hearts of those dear parents who make my happiness the whole study of their lives” (46). Reverting to her original inclination to reject her seducer, Charlotte meets Montraville to deliver the news. Montraville attempts to persuade Charlotte, to which she replies: “how shall I act?” (47). Abandoning her own judgement, Charlotte forfeits her conscience in this moment, and faints – abandoning both physical action and actual voice. In making the decision that Charlotte can’t, Montraville replies: “Let me direct you” as he lifts Charlotte into the chaise (47). Leaving behind her agency, the unconscious Charlotte embarks on a journey she originally intended to avoid. Reading Charlotte’s forfeiture of agency as a warning to readers, Rowson illustrates the dangers that coincide with female voicelessness.

Significantly, Rowson highlights the connection between soul and body in this scene. She writes, “So much do the emotions of the soul influence the body” (48). Reflecting an idea central to Enlightenment thought, Rowson connects the distressed soul to the body’s actions. In Charlotte’s case, her distressed mind causes her physical collapse. In this moment of unconsciousness, Charlotte has no voice, and subsequently no agency. When she is stripped of her (albeit) indecisive voice, Charlotte is left in isolation. Once on the ship, Charlotte addresses a letter to her parents explaining her unfortunate situation, asking for forgiveness, and acknowledging her hope for a future among them. The selfish and devious Montraville destroys Charlotte’s letter, successfully extinguishing her only hope for rediscovered agency. Subtly, we

learn of Charlotte's fall, when Rowson writes: "He had little to devote to the woman, whom he had brought from all her connections, and robbed of innocence" (65). The central conflict, and ultimately the reason for Charlotte's death, is not caused by our main character falling to seduction, but rather by her abandonment of her voice. An analysis of these moments where Charlotte fails to give actual consent show that *Charlotte* is a tale that warns of the dangers of lost self-control, rather than seduction.

Charlotte, however, is not the only indecisive character. Montraville is also influenced by a wrongfully trusted friend, Belcour. In describing Montraville, Rowson writes:

with a mind ever open to conviction, had he been so fortunate as to possess a friend who would have pointed out the cruelty of endeavoring to gain the heart of an innocent artless girl, when he knew it was utterly impossible for him to marry her, and when gratification of his passion would be unavoidable infamy and misery to her, and a cause for never-ceasing remorse to himself: had these dreadful consequences been placed before him in a proper light, the humanity of his nature would have urged him to give up the pursuit: but Belcour was not his friend; he rather encouraged the growing passion of Montraville. (38)

Charlotte and Montraville are characterized by their trait of indecisiveness, and succumb to those who encourage them to make bad decisions. They are unable to make individual, self-guided decisions, and both Charlotte and Montraville make mistakes in the absence of a solid force of good guidance. Charlotte under the guidance of La Rue, and Montraville under the guidance of Belcour, both neglect their own independent thought. Charlotte is consistently convinced to abandon her moral judgment by her morally corrupt counterpart, while Montraville's poor judgment is reinforced by his.

The narrator directs the reader throughout the novel, serving as an alternative to LaRue and Belcour. The narrator's consistent direction supports my argument for reassessing the lesson of the novel. Successfully adhering to sentimental conventions, Rowson, through the voice of the narrator, invites and insists on the reader's emotional response throughout. As we witness Charlotte's unfortunate journey, the narrator consistently reminds the reader to have sympathy for fallen Charlotte. The guiding narrator offers a reason for Charlotte's fall:

In affairs of love, a young heart is never in more danger than when attempted by a handsome young soldier. A man of an indifferent appearance, will, when arrayed in a military habit, shew to advantage; but when beauty of person, elegance of manner, and an easy method of paying compliments, are united to the scarlet coat, smart cockade, and military sash, ah! well-a-day for the poor girl who gazes on him: she is in immediate danger; but if she listens to him with pleasure, 'tis all over with her, and from that moment she has neither eyes nor ears for any other object. (28)

Here, Rowson illustrates the danger that awaits a young girl who merely listens to the influences of a soldier. This narrative commentary serves as both a reminder and a warning to readers. Rowson reminds the reader to have sympathy for Charlotte as this danger is central to her fall while simultaneously warning the reader of the power of persuasion. Rowson's warning is not primarily about the loss of innocence, but rather about listening to a voice undeserving of attention. Warning the reader that there is a danger in a young woman heeding voices aside from her own, Rowson again highlights the importance of self-guided thought and decision, something early American society did not encourage women to embrace. The real seduction of the novel is not Charlotte's loss of purity, but rather her loss of agency and voice.

Because she ignores her own conscience, and ultimately selfhood, Charlotte's life is ruined. Charlotte realizes her own unfortunate situation only as her story is replicated by others; she continuously acts without thinking of herself. Like Charlotte and Montraville, La Rue and Belcour intended to marry once arrived in the new world of opportunity. Belcour abandons the plan and Charlotte, acknowledging Belcour's unjust actions, insists to Montraville: "Why, he should be obliged to keep his word" to which Montraville replies: "Well, but I supposed he has changed his mind, and then you know the case is altered" (61). It is only through this recognition of La Rue's misfortune, that Charlotte realizes her own—that Montraville is likely to leave her deserted, separated from any agency she may have had in England. Charlotte is reduced to tears and silence in the revelation of her own disastrous situation. Charlotte has the conscious ability to make judgements, but is unable to heed those judgements. In this passage, Rowson also highlights the conflicting gender standards that ultimately result in Charlotte's death. Montraville shows that Belcour, and he too, are free to change their minds without consequence. However, Charlotte is not allowed that freedom of acting without consequences.

Charlotte reflects a reality for women of the Republic. Situating the novel in the society of readers that made it a best seller, in *Prodigal Daughters* Marion Rust reads Charlotte as a character that reflects the lives of women in the new nation. Rust highlights the probable connections between reader and content, specifically analyzing Charlotte's characterization. Rust writes, "[Charlotte's] tragic indecisiveness, which made her a complete product of her surroundings, prey to nothing but circumstance—appealed to a female populace with increasingly limited capacity to experience themselves as independent, coherent beings in a post revolutionary culture" (107). *Charlotte* illustrates and explores the weak selfhood in women of early America, which Rust suggests is intriguing to Rowson's audience.

Arguably, this unequal and unjust construct is the “tale of truth” Rowson intended to unveil in the founding nation with *Charlotte*. Montraville, after taking, impregnating, and abandoning Charlotte, can claim that his attachment was “merely the impulse of the moment” (70). Without any physical (or social) mark from his actions, Montraville is free to marry Julia Franklin, Charlotte Temple’s foil. Meanwhile Charlotte is isolated, living without support, hope, or agency till she inevitably dies in childbirth. Although Charlotte attempts to reconcile her mistakes by asking for her parents’ forgiveness, she suffers greatly throughout the novel, and ultimately dies. Montraville is not initially remorseful, even when recognizing his own qualities as villainous, yet he is not publicly denigrated like Charlotte.

Rust also discusses the link between errancy and learning in the early Republic. She writes:

As exemplars of national virtue, women, like men, needed to learn, and learning required experimentation, but women’s experiments were uniquely terrifying, since they did not possess the corollary privilege of having their mistakes expunged from the record. In such a climate, the secret wish to abdicate all decision-making must have had its appeal, even though, as Charlotte’s story shows, it provided no real escape. (107)

While exploring this connection between trial and personal growth, Rust offers an explanation to Charlotte’s actions throughout the novel. She argues that Charlotte forfeits decision making altogether to illustrate that in the founding nation, women’s growth through risk-taking was actively opposed, and in fact, dangerous.

Using Rust’s argument to reason Charlotte’s inaction throughout the novel provides a better understanding of her forfeited sense of self. Building on Rust’s argument, I read Charlotte as a character who not only “abdicates all decision-making,” she allows other characters to direct

and define her life, which leads to her death. Even when assessing herself and identifying her own attributes, Charlotte relies on others. Caught in Belcour's lie, anxious of Montraville's neglect, Charlotte claims: "Oh Montraville, kill me, for pity's sake kill me, but do not doubt my fidelity" (84). Charlotte claims that death would be preferable to being viewed as unfaithful. It is evident that Charlotte is unable to see herself as a person in isolation from how others view her. By the end of the novel, Charlotte remains an insecure, unchanged character. She does not transform, nor does she have the opportunity to in the conclusion of the novel. While Rust claims that women in a confined society may desire to "abdicate all decision making," Charlotte suffers *because* she surrenders her choice and voice.

Arguably, it is Rowson's intent to present this critique of the founding nation. Charlotte, as a young woman, is unable to exercise her own voice and is continuously passive due to societal forces that deny women the opportunity to foster a conception of self. As Nina Baym discusses in *American Women Writers and the Work of History*, women faced this restricted learning all too often, she writes: "women's access to real-life experience was so limited compared to men's; indeed, education by life was a mode of tuition expressly denied to women, since the consequences of error were so often irredeemable" (15). Rowson highlights this inequality in learning with Charlotte. It is clear that in a society that denies her the opportunity to learn from experience, a character could be so lacking in selfhood.

Analyzing the consequences of Montraville's and Charlotte's actions highlights an even darker truth of womanhood in the early Republic. Charlotte's actions are not described as voluntary; instead, she is "robbed of innocence" (65). Rowson thus distances Charlotte from active agency. Because Charlotte does not actually act, nor even succumb to seduction, it is inappropriate to categorize it as a novel of seduction. In Charlotte's final living moments, she is

reunited with her father, whom she makes guardian of her child. In this final interaction, Charlotte claims “Protect her, and bless your dying—” (115). Still unable to even *name* herself, Charlotte dies as an undeveloped character. However Lucy, Charlotte’s child, is the embodiment of a hopeful future. Noting that Charlotte’s sole self-directed decision—giving her child to her father—is one that influences the future, this active thinking and action, rather than continuous *inaction*, is what will influence future generations. Concluding the novel with our main character finally making a decision for herself suggests that there is possibility for women to foster a sense of selfhood, though unfortunately for Charlotte, her own society rejects that idea.

Charlotte is not merely a novel of the unavoidable consequences of seduction, but rather one that illustrates the harmful effects of female voicelessness. Charlotte is unable to rely on herself throughout the novel and eventually dies leaving behind a child for her parents to raise. Even in her final moments, Charlotte is unable to recognize herself and her ability. Through Charlotte, Rowson suggests that the worst fate for women in the new Republic is neglected agency and voice. *Charlotte* could easily be considered a story of seduction with the attention to deceit of European characters, but noticing and addressing the subtleties allows for a more complex overall theme, one that suggests a need for female agency in the new Republic.

Ch. II: Silence and Unattainable Freedom in *The Coquette*

Another popular eighteenth century novel of seduction, Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette*, solidifies the efforts of early American novelists to create works of literary importance, rather than mere melodrama. Evaluating the written voice of female characters like Eliza Wharton, Lucy Freeman/Sumner, Julia Granby, Mrs. Richman and Mrs. Wharton reveals that the novel is more than simple entertainment for readers in the early Republic; it critiques the constructs imposed on them. Two critical views regard Foster's work as either a conservative confirmation of the societal constructs in the late eighteenth century, or an argument against the injustice that these constructs create for women's everyday life. I argue that Foster maintains a balance between reinforcing the conventional women's role in the Republic and subtly critiquing the injustices that these roles demand.

Analyzing female characterization throughout the novel, specifically the main character Eliza, supports this complex and somewhat contradictory reading. It would be easy to label Eliza as a faulty character intended to teach female readers to avoid an independent life and adhere to the sphere of domesticity. However, while adhering to the conventions of sentimental writing, Foster allows the early American reader to both learn from Eliza's faults while also sympathizing with her character. She is neither a demoralized character to simply shame, nor a radically progressive character to admire. Eliza, unlike Charlotte, knows what she desires, but cannot achieve it, because society does not allow it. Through the course of the novel Eliza transforms from an ambitious woman to a disastrously anguished character. From the beginning of the novel, Eliza acknowledges the importance of self-guidance as a guide to fulfilling her desires.

Eliza notes the value of reason when writing to Lucy in the beginning of the novel, she claims “Oh my cousin, beware of the delusions of fancy! Reason must be our guide, if we would expect durable happiness” (51).

The Coquette, an epistolary novel composed entirely of 74 letters, details each character’s thoughts through their own writing. Characters offer guidance, understanding, and forgiveness to one another while they share despair and grief with the reader. This free exchange between characters allows the reader to access their thoughts and actions while becoming involved in Eliza’s story. This free exchange narration, paired with the disastrous plot-line, allows Foster to both illustrate the oppressive standards of eighteenth century America, and challenge the lack of mobility for women in the new Republic. Through female characters, their exchanges with one another, and their often unsatisfactory circumstances, Foster illustrates the immobility of women in the eighteenth century.

In the late eighteenth century, sentimental novels were the most commonly employed form of writing. For Foster, the genre provided distance between herself as an author, and the scandalous topics she described in her writing (Harris 369). *The Coquette* is a fictionalized telling of the true and mysterious death of Elizabeth Whitman, the daughter of a Massachusetts minister who was found in a Danvers tavern “seduced and abandoned” (Davidson, *Revolution* 222). This factual base for Foster’s story averted her from charges of impropriety, as the novel was not a product of her imagination, but rather based on truth. Employing the epistolary novel form also allowed Foster to challenge the stigma regarding female readers. In “Flirting with Destiny: Ambivalence and Form in the Early American Sentimental Novel” scholar Cathy Davidson claims, “This same novel demonstrates how real questions about woman's proper place could be advanced in the very form that supposedly provided socially conservative answers to

those same questions” (28). Here, Davidson suggests the very form of Foster’s writing, an epistolary novel, challenges conventional ideologies of the new nation. She suggests that through this form, which was intended to teach young readers, particularly young female readers, how to act and how not to act, Foster challenges readers to think about women’s roles. Foster inverts the form of the epistolary novel to subtly challenge socially conservative ideas.

The main character Eliza is introduced as a relieved, newly single woman, who desires a freedom that is not accorded to women of her time. After her fiancé Mr. Haley dies, she writes to her friend Lucy Freeman: “A melancholy event has lately extricated me from those shackles, which parental authority had imposed on my mind. Let me then enjoy that freedom which I so highly prize. Let me have opportunity, unbiased by opinion, to gratify my natural disposition in a participation of those pleasures which youth and innocence afford” (13). Free from the proposal that bound her to a married life, Eliza decides to live a life outside of tradition. Eliza's reluctance to marry is the unavoidable result of a society that reduced female mobility through marriage. As Cathy Davidson writes discussing the topic of marriage in early America,

Marriage, for the women involved, was mostly a change in masters. The new bride, admittedly, was to be protected by her husband, and she was protected, so far as the law was concerned, because her rights were subsumed in his. Yet as many legal historians have shown, a wife’s status as *feme covert* effectively rendered her legally invisible ... a married woman’s signature had no weight on legal documents and she had no individual legal identity. (*Revolution* 194)

Davidson highlights the freedom that our main character is so fearful of losing in marriage.

Distancing herself from the traditional domestic role, Eliza wants to exercise her own

individuality. Eliza does not view marriage as a stable unit of protection, but a confining construct that reduces what little autonomy she has.

As Eliza's rejection of a traditional married life reveals, Foster's objective is more complex than a simple warning about the dangers of seduction. Though readers sympathize with Eliza, I argue that we cannot simply label Eliza as a victim of seduction, nor can we reduce Foster's work to a didactic tale of submissive womanhood. Unlike Charlotte Temple, who is not held responsible for her own demise due to her inability to find and utilize a sense of agency, Eliza is a thirty seven year old adult with the ability to make self-directed decisions. Eliza has sensible guiding figures throughout the story, friendly correspondents like Lucy Sumner, Julia Granby, and Mrs. Richman, who offer advice in attempts to direct Eliza in making thoughtful, cautious decisions. The headstrong and somewhat contradictory Eliza is assured in rejecting these confining and personally undesirable situations, but less confident in creating the life that she does desire. The complex conflict of the novel is not that Eliza affirms the wrong decision, but namely that she cannot obtain the freedom that she desires and lacks the ability to learn from past mistakes. This inaction, joined with the monumental silencing of the female voice, illustrates the destructive confines of eighteenth century America that are the reality for women like Eliza.

Eliza is conflicted when faced with the choice to marry the Reverend Boyer or continue to form a relationship with the "rake" Peter Sanford, knowing both situations will result in a check on her own autonomy, self-direction, and ultimately individualism. Aware of the restrictions that accompany married life, Eliza writes of her previous conversation with Boyer:

I recoil at the thought of immediately forming a connection, which must confine me to the duties of domestic life, and make me dependent for happiness, perhaps too, for

subsistence, upon a class of people, who will claim the right of scrutinizing every part of my conduct; and by censuring those foibles, which I am conscious of not having prudence to avoid, may render me completely miserable. (29)

Here, Eliza is conscious of the responsibilities that accompany a domestic life, and acknowledges the limiting social sphere that she would inevitably join. Marrying a public figure like Reverend Boyer would invite the scrutiny of the surrounding society, a miserable future for Eliza. Unfortunately for Eliza, she is left with an equally unsatisfying alternative.

Eliza's conception of marriage leads the reader to question whether her rejection is a result of her incessant desire for a life free from restraints, or a reflection of her own self-perception. By self-perception, I mean that Eliza has imagined a particular role and life for herself. When contemplating a marriage with Boyer, Eliza writes to Lucy, "His situation in life! I dare not enter it. My disposition is not calculated for that sphere. There are duties arising from the station, which I fear I should not be able to fulfill; cares and restraints to which I could not submit" (39). Eliza expresses her concern with being confined to the domestic sphere, a situation made worse by marriage to a public figure, which invites public scrutiny. Eliza writes that she is both unable to fulfill the roles required of a domestic wife, and unable to submit to the restraints that domestic life requires. This passage reveals Eliza's self-perception. Eliza distances herself from the traditional domestic role, claiming that she does not want to live under these constructs, or perhaps more importantly, refuses to submit to these constructs. Eliza suggests that the freedoms available to domestic women, limited to the household and domestic duties, are a rather confined freedom. Eliza's character challenges this constrained freedom, questioning if restricted freedom can actually be considered freedom. Because Eliza's self-perception rejects domesticity and she fails to find an alternative, Foster suggests that there is no place for women

who refuse this domestic role. The novel is thus focused on women's expected domestic role and the rejection of it.

As the novel continues, Eliza's hesitancy is confirmed when Mrs. Richman, the person who realizes Eliza's only positive, idealized conception of marriage, explains that her union does in fact circumscribe her happiness. Mrs. Richman writes to Eliza: "Not long since I was a gay, volatile girl; seeking satisfaction in fashionable circles and amusements; but now I am thoroughly domesticated. All my happiness is centered within the limits of my own walls; and I grudge every moment that calls me from the pleasing scenes of domestic life" (97). Eliza's reluctance to commit to a marriage is affirmed through Mrs. Richman's notions of married life. Though Mrs. Richman enjoys her circumscribed happiness, Eliza aims to find a union that can bring happiness *and* allow her to remain in her own social circle, rather than join her husband's.

Understanding Eliza's complex idea of freedom, then, is also crucial to Foster's intent. Eliza consistently writes to her correspondents expressing her desire to exercise her freedom. When rejecting Boyer's initial proposal, Eliza claims that she has not yet learned or explored her own individuality. Recounting the conversation in a letter to Lucy, Eliza writes: "Self-knowledge, sir, that most important of all sciences, I have yet to learn. Such have been my situations in life, and the natural volatility of my temper, that I have looked but little into my own heart in regard to its future wishes and views" (28-29). To the contemporary reader, this is an innocent and rather sensible reason to remain single. Eliza expresses a need for self reflection and independent thought, before accepting a proposal placing her in a situation similar to that which she recently escaped. The remainder of the novel however is not focused on Eliza finding her sense of self and attaining agency, but rather her failure to do just that. Despite showing

awareness of her own immaturity, Eliza never succeeds in developing a fully realized, viable role that rejects traditional domesticity but imagines something new.

Similar to the rhetoric employed in Rowson's work, Foster renders the position of women in the early Republic as dangerous. This is expressed through the repeated didactic comments from the female characters throughout the novel. The first warning that Eliza receives is from Mrs. Richman: "But beware, Eliza!—Though strewed with flowers, when contemplated by your lively imagination, it is, after all, a slippery, thorny path. The round of fashionable dissipation is dangerous, a phantom is often pursued, which leaves its deluded votary the real form of wretchedness" (13). In warning Eliza of both her own imagination, and future seducers, Mrs. Richman reminds Eliza of the dangers that accompany her unmarried state. And after rejecting Boyer's initial proposal and forming a relationship with her seducer Sanford, Eliza is warned by her female correspondents to be cautious of Sanford and his intentions. After finding Eliza in conversation with Sanford, Boyer rejects a future with Eliza and proposes to Maria Selby, while the deceitful Sanford marries Nancy for her fortune. Instead of imagining and preparing for a life separate from her two unsatisfactory suitors, Eliza slowly distances herself from her female correspondents and succumbs to Sanford's unfaithful flattery.

In distress over the rejection of both suitors, Eliza abandons her once headstrong nature. She writes to Lucy,

I knew not my own heart, when I contemplated a connection with him. Little did I think that my regard for Mr. Boyer was so deeply rooted, as I now find it. I foolishly imagined that I could turn my affections into what channel I pleased. What then must have been my feelings, when I found myself deprived of both inward peace, and outward enjoyment!

(120)

Eliza, admitting that she still lacks self-knowledge, is left stripped of the happiness that she has been so intent on seeking throughout the novel. After this rejection, Eliza contradictorily laments the connection she could have had with Boyer. Disappointed in both suitors, and herself, Eliza becomes increasingly despondent.

This despondency, joined with the silence that follows, is ultimately the main conflict of the novel. Long before Eliza's seduction, she falls silent, subsequently failing to find the freedom, and arguably selfhood, that she consistently desired. Boyer writes Eliza a letter in review of her conduct, criticizing both her unsatisfactory manners and dress. Eliza writes to Lucy of her melancholy and Lucy replies with advice: "Rise then above it; and prove yourself superior to the adverse occurrences which have befallen you. It is by surmounting difficulties, not by sinking under them, that we discover our fortitude. True courage consists not in flying from the storms of life; but in braving and steering through them with prudence" (112). Lucy encourages Eliza to be persistent and not surrender to her difficulties. Rather than accepting Lucy's advice that allows for self growth, Eliza falls silent. Following the rejection by Boyer and the disastrous re-connection with Sanford, Eliza writes: "Writing is an employment, which suits me not at the present. It was pleasing to me formerly, and therefore, by recalling the idea of circumstances and events which frequently occupied my pen in happier days, it now gives me pain" (134). Rejecting communication with her companions and the reader, Eliza abandons her voice, the very vessel of her past autonomy.

In the new Republic, there was a disagreement on whether, and how, to educate women. Men and women took both sides, defending or rejecting a structured system for female education. As Linda Kerber discusses in her critical work devoted to women's education in the Republic, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, there was a

negative connotation often attached to female learning. In describing this inequality that is inherent in Republican womanhood, Kerber writes “Academic study, a meritorious male pursuit, seemed self-indulgent when found among women. Americans inherited the image of the learned woman as an unenviable anomaly and kept alive the notion that the woman who developed her mind did so at her own risk” (191). The very quality that marked men as ambitious and commendable, consequently resulted in the opposite for women. A nation focused on limiting women’s education ultimately limits the selfhood of the women within that nation. Elizabeth Whitman, the factual base for Eliza Wharton, was noted as a profound reader of novels. This novel reading was even cited as the cause of her downfall in articles written after her death (Harris 369). In Foster’s retelling of Whitman’s story, she does not attribute Eliza’s downfall to her reading habit, but carefully illustrates, instead, her failure to read. Lucy sends Eliza books to read when she is most reclusive. Rather than read the novels, Eliza rejects them. Eliza, neglects to exercise the independent thought she desired earlier in the novel, and now rejects her only available resource for education when Lucy sends her the books to read. Again, this inaction takes the forefront, illustrating the idleness and silence detrimental to Eliza.

As Eliza is the most complex character in the novel, she can be disdained for her actions but also sympathized with and understood for her shortcomings. Eliza is not a radically progressive character, but rather one that rejects the traditional women’s roles in a society that punished rebellion. Placing Kerber’s historicization in conversation with Eliza’s character allows for a better understanding of Foster’s intent. Regarding education in the late eighteenth century, Kerber writes:

The education of young women had traditionally been an education for marriage—if at all possible, an upwardly mobile marriage. Girls were said to need a new kind of

education because their traditional training had been superficial and their resulting behavior shallow. How, it was asked, can women's minds be free if they are taught that their sphere is limited to fashion, music and needlework? (203)

Kerber's study offers a reason for Eliza's rejection of Lucy's offered books. If education focused on preparing women for marriage and domestic life, Eliza would not be apt to choose to read this. The freedom that Eliza desires is not available, and surely is not suggested to women at the time through their education. When Boyer's loyal correspondent Selby writes to him of Eliza's disposition, he claims, "It cannot be the result of her education. Such as one she has received, is calculated to give her a very different turn of mind" (54). Here Boyer suggests that female education was intended to encourage a different, more submissive woman, the ideal domestic that Eliza refused to be, despite her education.

Although Eliza is brutally punished for her unconventional actions, Foster does not support the conservative view of domestic womanhood. Analyzing the other female characters in the novel leads the reader to consider a more complex understanding. Mrs. Wharton, Eliza's virtuous mother, embodies the traditional role of Republican womanhood, but is powerless, unhappy, and disconnected from her only child throughout the novel. Discussing the novel's inconsistencies, Cathy Davidson writes, "If virtue is to be rewarded, then surely Mrs. Wharton's life should be rich, an example to both her daughter and the reader. Yet the mother is exactly what the daughter does not want to be, and the novel validates the daughter's judgment" (*Revolution* 230). The novel does not simply support one correct model of womanhood. Instead, Foster illustrates the various models, leaving the reader to decide which may be the best option— if there are any— for women in the early Republic.

Davidson claims the novel proposes the question: “how does one escape the social parameters of female powerlessness and female constraint?” But Foster ultimately leaves the question unanswered. While I agree with Davidson’s formulation of the novel’s central question, I do think Foster offers an answer. Although the novel is filled with ambiguities, this question is answered through Eliza’s fate. Eliza consistently strives for “durable happiness” and desires an exploration of the self, but is prevented from creating a foundation for either (51). Eliza then, embodies the inescapability of those social parameters. In choosing to form a relationship with Sanford, Eliza forfeits her chances of finding selfhood. Perhaps, Eliza should be neither praised nor completely sympathized with, but instead recognized as a redeemable character who could not be redeemed due to societal constraints. In other words, the answer is that there is no escape from those social constructs.

The novel is far more complex than simply a didactic tale of sin and subsequent death. Eliza is flawed, she makes mistakes and is unable to learn from them, but she is also a caring friend, striving for selfhood and independence. The reader sympathizes with Eliza, and the novel supports this. Eliza is silenced and moved to Salem at the end of the novel, living in a room with the initials “P.S.” overhead. As Daniel Couch highlights in “Eliza Wharton's Scraps of Writing Dissipation and Fragmentation in *The Coquette*” these letters are an indicator for Peter Sanford, Eliza’s seducer, but they also suggest a symbolic postscript. Couch claims this postscript solidifies Eliza as unreadable, however I argue for a more complex evaluation of the symbolic postscript. Rather than completely silencing her tragic main character, Foster allows Eliza to remain a postscript. Though forbidden communication with the reader, Eliza’s physical location behind these initials gives her a secure place in the conclusion of the novel. Eliza is the

imperative reminder of the novel's inescapable constructs, similar to the afterthought, or "P.S." recorded in a letter.

Ch. III: Powerful Voices with Limited Futures in *Hope Leslie*

While the two novels of seduction that I've discussed both propose a question concerning women's inability to form a self-governing character, Catharine Maria Sedgwick's historical novel *Hope Leslie* (1827) offers a radically different perspective. Pairing this novel with novels of seduction written 30 years prior, allows for insights into the status of women in the founding nation as portrayed through fiction. Sedgwick is writing during the Jacksonian Era, a time when government was fixed on assimilating and removing Native Americans from their land in order to continue the expansion of the United States. Sedgwick's novel gives voice to Native American characters at a time when the United States government argued for their omission from American society. Further, Sedgwick lends heroic action to female characters, interposing them with authoritative figures, illustrating that women, though politically powerless, are able to make justifiable decisions to correct societal injustices. The main character Hope embodies the democratic values that are encouraged for men but restricted for women. As discussed in the previous chapters, both Charlotte and Eliza are flawed characters that are subsequently reprimanded by the novel and society, but Sedgwick portrays Hope as heroic because of her flaws. Hope's flaws, which make her uniquely unlike the subservient women of the Republic, are what enable her to question authority and effectively correct unjust and immoral situations. The novel commends Hope and the self-assured female characters, leaving those susceptible to seduction without a place in Sedgwick's revised Republic. Casting seduction aside, Sedgwick envisions the attainable agency found through female independent thought that both women in the Republic and women in the nineteenth century needed in order to argue for citizenship. Sedgwick notes in the introduction regarding her imagined female character that "we are

confined not to the actual, but the possible” an important reminder to female readers living in a patriarchal society that limited their agency and ignored their political potential (6).

Though written in 1827, the novel is set in the seventeenth century as a retelling of colonial American history. Sedgwick does not claim to be writing a historically accurate account. Rather, she introduces the novel as one that uses real characters and events “to illustrate not the history, but the character of the times” (5). Taking my cue from Sedgwick, rather than read the events of the novel as historically accurate or inaccurate, I suggest that characterization takes the forefront of Sedgwick’s complex work. The novel begins with a gruesome illustration of the Deerfield Massacre, refers to the Pequod War early on, cites passages from Bradford’s *History of Plymouth Plantation*, and ends with a ship explosion similar to the explosion of the ship *Mary Ross* in Boston Harbor in 1640 (Bell 217). Using historical accuracy made the novel appealing to the women of the Republic who were encouraged to read history, rather than what were viewed as morally dubious novels. Though Sedgwick clearly crafted *Hope Leslie* with an eye to historical accuracy, she uses her place as an author to voice the characters in a way not recorded in history. Comparing Hope’s voice to Magawisca’s, Everell’s, and Esther’s illustrates Sedgwick’s purpose: to create a self governing female character that the true colonial America did not encourage but that her reader might imagine.

Arguably, Hope is the embodiment of the democratic ideologies that the founders of the Republic wanted to embrace in the new society. In a society that encouraged women to be subservient and dependent on others, Hope is radically self-reliant. In Sedgwick’s colonial revisioning, these identities encouraged for men are embodied in female characters. Both Hope and her sister Faith are sent to live with the Fletchers and their two Native American servants (Magawisca and Oneco) after their mother’s death. Shortly after their arrival, a group of

Mohawks and Mononotto, a Pequod Chief and father to Magawisca and Oneco, attack the Fletcher family, killing Mrs. Fletcher and her children in an attempt to take back his children. Faith is captured in the attack, and Hope, who has been away with Mr. Fletcher during the attack, is left motherless again. Left without the traditional Republican mother figure, Hope relies on her own intuition for guidance. Thus, early in the novel Hope begins to develop a self-governing sensibility.

Hope recognizes the opportunities that the new nation offers its settlers, looking to America as the Promised Land described in seventeenth century literature. Later in the novel, when Hope insists on accompanying Mr. Fletcher to explore Northampton, she writes to Everell describing her aunt's thoughts on her untraditional disposition:

Aunt Grafton remonstrated, and expressed her natural and kind apprehensions, by alleging that it was 'very unladylike, and a thing quite unheard of in England,' for a young person, like me, to go out exploring a new country. I urged, that our new country develops faculties that young ladies, in England, were unconscious of possessing. (98)

From her own description, Hope is an unconventional character who seems to be equipped with the selfhood that the majority of female characters in early American literature lack. Through this foundational sense of self, Hope is able to find agency throughout the novel. And, through Hope, Sedgwick illustrates the desires of nineteenth century women to form a new view of femininity.

Hope's internal idea of herself and her presentation of that self to others are different from the traditional Republican woman's. The narrator reminds us of Hope's opposition to the ordinary, claiming:

Nothing could be more unlike the authentic, ‘thoroughly educated,’ and thoroughly disciplined young ladies of the present day, than Hope Leslie; ... Neither could anything on the outward show, be more unlike a modern belle, than Hope Leslie, in her dress of silk or muslin, shaped with some difference to the fashion of the day, but more according to the dictates of her own skill and classic taste, which she followed, somewhat pertinaciously, in spite of the suggestions of her experienced aunt. (122)

This *differentness* in dress, action, and altogether character, sets Hope apart from women in her own time but also from the women of the Republic, those women living in the time in which the novel is set. Hope isn’t different on a whim; she is described as *pertinacious*, holding true to her own ideas even when authoritative figures offer guidance.

Hope is not only different in her self-presentation. When faced with injustice, Hope continuously rejects authority to correct, through her own moral guidance, what influential Puritan figures deem unlawful. For example, when a Pequot tribe elder named Nelema is wrongly jailed for witchcraft, Hope defends her innocence during the prosecution. Hope claims that Nelema is as innocent as herself, to which Mr. Pyncheon replies: “‘Thou art somewhat forward, maiden,’ he said, ‘in giving thy opinion; but thou must know, that we regard it but as the whistle of a bird; withdraw and leave judgement to thy elders’” (109). Discrediting Hope’s defense, suggesting that it is not to be taken seriously, Mr. Pyncheon sentences Nelema to death. Understanding that the men in power find her voice irrelevant, Hope acts against this ruling, freeing Nelema from prison herself. Hope does not abandon her sense of self-trust here, instead it becomes the driving force to correct the unjust authoritative action. In a society that understood weakness and emotionalism as dominantly female traits, Sedgwick re-visions sympathy to be a dominant force for justice. Sedgwick insists that women are not only able to make justified

decisions, but can correct the mistakes of higher authority through exercising this free thinking. Hope has radical ideas of self-reliance, the same ideas expressed a decade later by Ralph Waldo Emerson in "Nature."

The input from the narrator frees readers to commend Hope rather than shame her for rejecting authoritative ruling. Though she never openly admits to her involvement in Nelema's escape, Hope is sent to live under the Puritan guardianship of the Winthrops in Boston where she will receive proper, and far stricter guidance. The narrator, in support of Hope's actions, claims: "Hope Leslie took counsel only from her own heart, and that told her that the rights of innocence were paramount to all other rights, and as to danger to herself, she did not weigh it—she did not think of it" (120). Other characters want to contain and control Hope's headstrong tendencies. But the novel, through the voice of the narrator, argues that this quality is necessary when wrongs have been committed. Sedgwick again builds from the what society considered female traits, highlighting how emotionalism can be used not only to foster justice, but a female sense of self and agency. Perhaps Hope's ability to find agency, through independent thought, is what women in the Republic and in the nineteenth century desired.

Sedgwick extends this characteristic of moral guidance to another heroic female character, Magawisca. When Mononotto plans to kill Everell in an "execution of exact and necessary justice," Magawisca opposes her tribe (91). Defying her father to defend her English friend, Magawisca attempts to save Everell from her father's rage. She questions her father's intent, claiming "Oh, my father, has your heart become stone?" (87). Like Hope, when Magawisca's voice is disregarded, she turns to physical action. As Mononotto raises the weapon to end Everell's life, Magawisca interposes her arm, risking herself to save his life. In this act of heroism, Magawisca corrects the corrupted justice of her father and, by extension, her tribe. In

lending heroic action to both of these female characters, Sedgwick illustrates women's capacity to make moral, justified, decisions to oppose an unjust authority. She allows a space for female characters to be involved in the political sphere, as a force for justice, when the legal power system fails to serve its intended purpose. Because both Magawisca, a Native American, and Hope, a white woman, experience voicelessness, the novel strongly suggests it is a common experience among women, one that transcends both race and culture. Both characters oppose authority. When authorities refuse to listen, their voices lose effectiveness, and they resort to physical action.

With these characters, Sedgwick illustrates a common concern for women not only in colonial America but in the nineteenth century as well. Both Magawisca and Hope are limited not by their intellectual ability or by a characteristic of indecisiveness, but rather by the constructs of the society around them. Women did not have a full voice in American government until after passage of the 19th amendment in 1920. Regarding the political status of women in early America, Linda Kerber writes that "Because women were not thought to be political beings, they did not serve on juries; their absence meant that accused women did not receive trial before their peers. Women were present in the courtroom only as plaintiffs, defendants, or witnesses—as recipients, rather than dispensers, of justice" (Kerber 153). Women were absent from the political culture, and subsequently absent from a sense of political awareness because "the courthouse was, in effect, the physical locale in which public political education took place" (Kerber 154). In *Hope Leslie* Sedgwick questions this political absence through Hope and Magawisca, and their ability to not only be present in political affairs but to be morally corrective to governmental authorities. Not only do these female characters demand a role in the political square, they resist restriction to the domestic sphere.

When Mr. Fletcher explains that Hope will be sent to live with the Winthrops in Boston, she blatantly resists moving. Despite her pleas, her voice is ineffective and she is relocated to live with the Winthrops. Once there, Governor Winthrop suggests a marriage for Hope. While discussing Hope's future suitors with Mr. Fletcher, Governor Winthrop, finding fault in Hope's desire for self-governance, claims, "I am impatient to put jesses on this wild bird of yours, while she is on our perch" (155). His response is to restrict her mobility by pairing her in a marriage, effectually subsuming her rights under her husband's. Rather than encourage the independent and self-reliant thinking that Hope embodies, Governor Winthrop intends to circumscribe this individualism. Not only does Sedgwick illustrate the conflict regarding woman's independence and role in society, but she also acknowledges the political unease recognized in colonial America. Sedgwick presents Hope as a character that advocates for these democratic values which are consistently restricted by authority. Governor Winthrop's main concern is to preserve the traditional norms in the Puritan community, for marrying Hope to the evil rake Sir Philip will constrict her to a traditional role in their society. Marriage will make Hope and any other woman an exclusively private person. Again, Sedgwick questions the morality of the political sphere. Because women's rights were subsumed under the rights of her husband through coverture (as discussed in Ch. II), marriage, an otherwise private matter, is a political issue affecting women's the legal status. Sedgwick challenges the morality of this restricted status suggesting that Hope would not simply fortify her subservience, but lose her self-reliance in marriage.

Throughout *Hope Leslie* Sedgwick illustrates different partnerships that enable characters' success. Hope is a strikingly independent character, but would be less progressive without the help of other characters. Sedgwick positions Hope as a member of several sisterhood relations; not only are Hope and Faith blood sisters, but Hope and Magawisca share a bond

similar to sisterhood. Hope and Esther share a strong friendship and Hope and Rosa (disguised as Sir Phillip's male page) share a protective partnership. Much like Sedgwick's illustration of the inherent struggles of womanhood that transcend race and class, these partnerships among characters relay a similar impartiality. Specifically exploring the moments of confrontation in the novel, Magawisca and Hope support one another against a dominant, often political force, illustrating instances where moral guidance joined with sympathy trump the societal anxieties concerning race.

The relationship between Rosa and Hope illustrates Sedgwick's unconventional use of sisterhood in the novel. When Spanish, Catholic Rosa, disguised as Sir Philip's page, finds Hope unaccompanied upon her return from a visit with Sir Philip, she suggests that she should avoid an unpleasant future with Sir Philip. Rosa proposes an agreement with Hope; she pleads, "Promise me you will not love my master. Do not believe him, though he pledge the word of a true knight always to love you;—though he swear it on the holy crucifix, do not believe it!" (168). Founding a protective friendship with Hope, Rosa attempts to prevent Hope from trusting Sir Philip. Hope trusts the disguised Rosa and responds with an agreement to the terms that she set. This sisterhood between Hope and Rosa suggests a type of partnership that is necessary in changing the roles of women in the Republic. Sedgwick suggests that through this sisterhood there is a necessary collective effort to repel seduction.

Sedgwick continues to re-vision the colonial woman as not only independent, but wily and opportunistic. For example, several characters successfully use disguises. Disguise plays an interesting role throughout the novel; it does not simply illustrate a strictly negative connotation, nor does it strictly imply a character's cleverness. The goodness of a character determines whether or not his or her use of disguise is virtuous. Trapped in a boat with a dangerous stranger,

for example, Hope convinces him that she is not an escaped hostage, but the Virgin Mary. When Hope uses disguise to save her own life, and later on in the novel uses disguise to save Magawisca from a life of imprisonment, it is presented as both clever and life-saving. On the other hand, Sir Philip, an entirely corrupt character, uses disguise to pass as an honorable Puritan but in actuality is a Catholic, and a former sympathizer of Thomas Morton, a known opponent to the Puritan strictures that prevailed in both Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay.

Because *Hope Leslie* is a historical fiction, much of the plot is influenced by true moments in American history. However, Sedgwick includes a progression in the plot that is similar to that in novels of seduction but relays a different implication from the novels discussed in the previous chapters. Sedgwick makes the story of seduction a subplot distanced from the main theme of *Hope Leslie*, implying that seduction is less important than the development of self-reliance that the main plot illustrates. The plot line concerning Rosa and Sir Philip is a story of seduction, one that reflects both the mistrust and misguidance found in *Charlotte Temple*. Sir Philip reveals his deceitfulness in bringing Rosa to the colonies, claiming, “I still had some lingering of love for her, and pity (don’t scoff!); and besides, Morton’s representations had led me to believe that she would not be an inconvenient member of the household at Merry Mount, so I permitted her to disguise herself, and come over the rough seas with me” (200). In the same letter, Sir Philip writes of his “ambition to win her heart—my determination to possess her hand” referring not to Rosa, but Hope Leslie (202). Rosa, who is caught reading the letter responds by admitting her error in trusting her seducer. After Philip claims she agreed to join him in his voyage out of her own good-will, Rosa replies: “Ay Sir Philip—and will not the innocent babe stretch its arms to the assassin if he does but smile on it? You told me you loved me, and I believed you...where shall I go! If I go to the good, they will frown on me, and despise me; and I

cannot go to the wicked,—they have no pity” (203). Sedgwick illustrates a shared fault in this subplot that the novels of seduction from the preceding century also address. The novels of seduction discussed in the previous chapters highlight the consequences of seduction for the individual women involved, not simply the dangers to the social structures they disobey. By lending voice to the seduced woman, Sedgwick, like Foster and Rowson, highlights the punishment fallen women face from society.

Though Sedgwick rewrites the basis of the seduction plot to distance the women from being entirely at fault, she still illustrates that there is no place for seduction in the new world. Later in the novel Rosa and Sir Philip are both destroyed in a ship fire, symbolically erasing the possibility of future seducers in the colony. At the same time, the ship fire illustrates Rosa’s heroism. Rosa, noticing Hope as Sir Philip’s “helpless victim,” turns to act when her voice is rendered ineffective. After refuting Sir Philip’s dangerous and deceitful plan, Rosa exclaims, “it cannot be worse for any of us” and throws an oil lamp at a barrel of gunpowder, dramatically saving Hope from a terrible life under Sir Philip’s rule. Rosa, who several times claims she’d rather be dead than seduced, believes it’s better to set fire to the ship than to allow Sir Philip to seduce and destroy Hope’s life. For Sedgwick, the life of the seduced and abandoned has no place in her re-visioned Republic. She offer instead a community of characters that act on judgement and independent thought, rather than lustful passion.

The fate of other female characters underscores Sedgwick’s re-visioned femininity. Esther, the example of Puritan obedience and subservience, is not rewarded with a place in the community but rather is sent to live in England in the concluding chapter. Esther does not act by the independent moral thought that influences Hope to correct injustices. When Everell and Hope propose Esther’s involvement in Magawisca’s trial, she refuses to act against the unjust

authorities. Esther explains her reasoning for remaining impartial. After quoting the Bible, she claims “it would be to sin presumptuously, to do aught, in any way, to countervail the authority of those chosen servants of the Lord, whose magistracy we are privilege to live under” (278). Esther cannot imagine acting in opposition to authority, even for compassionate and justified reason. By placing the obedient Esther in England, Sedgwick proposes that this vision of femininity better belongs in the Old World.

Sedgwick’s vision of femininity both supports and encourages self-reliance, independence, and curiosity, which Hope embodies entirely. However, in the conclusion of the novel, Magawisca, our other self-reliant female character, has no place in the colony. Through Magawisca’s own decision to stay with her tribe, she refuses her place in the founding colonies. Magawisca claims “the Indian and the white man can no more mingle, and become one, than day and night” (330). Re-visioning this brutal past between colonists and Native Americans, Sedgwick appears to support the removal of Natives. Sedgwick solidifies two separate Americas, one belonging to Native Americans, and one belonging to the expanding colonists. Sedgwick suggests this by illustrating not only Magawisca’s displacement, but Hope’s sister Faith’s rejection of colonial society. Faith, who marries Oneco and becomes a part of his tribe, has no place in her previous home. She rejects English dress and chooses a life with Oneco rather than return to life in the colonies.

Though Sedgwick illustrates the partnerships and struggles that transcend both race and class in both colonial America and the nineteenth century, she neglects to address the potential for women of different races to live together on American soil. In a novel which states that limits are only set by what is possible, one may question why Sedgwick did not imagine a place for our

two heroines to live together. Judith Fetterly describes Sedgwick's failure to address the conflict with Indian removal:

Nothing in her text suggests that Sedgwick can imagine a future for Magawisca within America...she does not choose to use her text as an opportunity to challenge American complacency and complicity in removal or to propose that the failure to solve the conundrum of differences lies more in a lack of commitment than in the limitations of rhetorical models or a failure of imagination. (93)

Though Sedgwick does not critique the complicity of early Americans in Indian removal by allowing a place for Magawisca in the colonies, she does challenge the complacency of both colonial America and the political climate of the nineteenth century by rejecting her place in the colonies. Sedgwick carefully constructs Magawisca as a Native American parallel to Hope Leslie, suggesting their similarities are stronger than the boundary of race that divides them. These characters reveal Sedgwick's intent to question this political complacency. Both characters are radically self-reliant and heroic, but one has no place in the re-visioned Republic simply because of her race. As a result, Sedgwick invites the reader to question the morality of Indian removal—creating a character so much like the protagonist but denying them a shared future.

Ch. IV: Tempered Progressivism in Catharine Maria Sedgwick's Didactic Tales

In the decade following her most successful novel, *Hope Leslie*, Sedgwick published a collection of three didactic tales per request of Henry Ware Jr., a prominent New England Unitarian. He suggested that Sedgwick should contribute to a literature that presented “the practical character and influence of Christianity” (Kelley 39). The didactic tales were presented as domestic novels: *Home: A Story of New England Life* (1835), *The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man* (1836), and *Live and Let Live: Domestic Service Illustrated* (1837). Varying in form and content from her earlier historical fiction, these tales are a straightforward portrayal of life in the nineteenth century. Though lacking the stylistic and thematic complexity found in her earlier works, like *Hope Leslie* and *The Linwoods*, the didactic novels continue to offer a new vision of womanhood in the Republic. Each novel in Sedgwick's trilogy focuses on a different element of American society, supporting the democratic values of the new nation. These didactic tales, which were written to advise a wide and popular audience, illustrate a tempered progressivism, rather than a uniquely independent revisioning of womanhood.

Home, the first of Sedgwick's didactic trilogy, offers an imperfect portrayal of domestic life. Sedgwick's vision of home is not without conflict, betrayal, or deceit, but confronts these struggles with a determination to overcome them. *Home* is the story of William Barclay, a “capable, diligent, and frugal” self-taught New England printer, and the challenges that accompany raising a family alongside running a business. Throughout the novel William is struck with a feeling of homesickness from leaving behind his childhood home in Greenbook. William is appropriately homesick. In the early nineteenth century, Americans struggled with the

social, political, and economic anxiety that accompanied nation building after separating from English rule. William's homesickness illustrates this innate tie to the home, an affectionate connection to a simpler time. In characterizing William in this way, Sedgwick questions this tendency to turn to a simpler time as resolution. Rather than validate the power of nostalgia, William can only succeed by starting a new life separate from Greenbrook. Reading the premise of *Home* as an allegory for the new Republic, as I do, it is important that William and his wife Anne do not deny or disregard their connection to the past, but rather want to return to it. However, the novel argues that such a return is impossible.

Denying the return to a pre-revolutionary way of life, Sedgwick illustrates an envisioned home that is founded and sustained through education. Although William longs for the home of his childhood, he establishes himself in New York. The Barclays' new home is soon filled with the necessary items of everyday life—far from luxurious. With money from Anne's father, William purchases simple furniture to fill their new house. This frugality allows him to purchase more of "the stock which would yield the best income"—books (11). In relaying his financial decisions to Anne, William states:

"Instead of twenty-five dollars' worth of glass and gilding, we have some of the best productions of the best minds. Instead of a poor gratification of our vanity, or at best our eyes, we have a productive capital, from which we may derive exhaustless pleasure, which hundreds may share, and which those who come after us may enjoy. Oh who can estimate the value of a book!" (12).

Here, Sedgwick emphasizes the importance of education within the home. These books are not just for William, but selected for both the husband and wife and their servant too.

In a time focused on women's education, Sedgwick offers a didactic tale in support of female learning, a debate that would later be termed the "woman question" (Davidson, *Revolution* 24). This political and social contention which was central to the shaping of the new Republic focused on whether and how to educate women. As discussed in the introduction, intellectual challenge was thought to be "literally dangerous" to women (Kerber 247). In describing a home filled with books, Sedgwick situates this political question within the private sphere. William explains his progressive views on female education, claiming "I believe that whatever tends to improve the minds and hearts of domestics will, to say the worst of it, not injure their service; and that every wise provision for their happiness multiplies the chances of their attachment and fidelity" (13). Domestics were traditionally women, and in this novel Mary is the domestic servant to the Barclays. Through this portrayal of expanded education, Sedgwick questions the restricting social constructs that limit female education. This illustration of home both supports education and rejects the idea that female education distracts women from their domestic roles, an argument inherent to conservative views on female education.

The novel continues to endorse the value of education when the Barclays foster an appreciation for learning in their children. While speaking with a friend Mr. Anthon, William claims,

"Now I had rather Alice should learn to draw, than that she should wear the prettiest earrings in New York, or any hardware of that description. I would rather my boys should learn from Professor Griscom something of the nature and riches of the world they live in, than to have a mirror the whole length of my mantelpiece. No Anthon, I can spare money elsewhere. But till I am compelled, I'll not spare it in the education of my children" (44-45).

This model family holds education above all other pursuits. Here Sedgwick envisions a family centered on education, rather than status, for men and women. Sedgwick supports female learning in this reserved, far from radical suggestion. The women in the novel are encouraged to read and learn but only in the confines of the domestic sphere. The daughters are encouraged to acquire an education rather than material objects, but their education, geared as it is toward drawing and domestic duties, lacks their brothers' academic focus. Sedgwick addresses the political concerns of her time, in this tempered progressivist portrayal.

Reading this tale as a didactic piece of literature, as it was intended, one cannot deny that it supports a traditional role for nineteenth century women. Sedgwick is not re-visioning a womanhood that supports and conceptualizes female independence. What this novel does do however, is illustrate the important role that women held within their dependent lives. As Mary Kelley writes discussing the literary domestics of Sedgwick's time,

Thinking as private domestic women that they could not enter the wide world, the literary domestics thought to make woman's private domestic world wider, and the thought was that women would shape society, by influencing and controlling man. The man living in the world by woman's ethics testified to the higher moral and spiritual sphere of the woman's life in the home. (308)

Although women were not involved in the political sphere, Sedgwick confirms their influence in the home. She does not envision a woman-centered world, but rather supports the traditional women's role in the male-centered world she lives in.

Sedgwick uses the didactic form to not only voice current political conversations regarding gender inequality, but also to illustrate social class formation. Her model home offers a vision of democratic values, one in which education is the foundation of a successful Republic.

In Sedgwick's portrayal education is not limited by or to class. Speaking on the topic of equal education, William explains to Anthon: "we do not yet realize that we live in a new state of things, and that equality, which is the basis of our institutions, should also, as far as possible be the basis of education" (43). Here Sedgwick suggests education should transcend class, a radical idea in the early nineteenth century. This idea is emphasized in Sedgwick's first novel *A New England Tale* as well, revealing education as a major theme throughout her writing.

Sedgwick offers a limited egalitarian perspective in *Home*, acknowledging the importance of different roles and the necessity of each within the Republic and within the home. Each community member has a particular purpose that is a part of maintaining a functioning society. In this novel, and in the two other didactic novels in the trilogy, Sedgwick envisions a community of people divided by class but without class tension. William again explains to Anthon: "It is certainly a false notion in a democratic republic, that a lawyer has any higher claim to respectability,—a gentility, if you please,—than a tanner; a goldsmith, a printer, or a builder" (46). In Sedgwick's envisioned family, the children are encouraged to pursue a career for their interest or talent, not for the class status attached to a profession. Continuing to illustrate this communitarian model, Sedgwick suggests that the Republic should be less focused on fashionable lifestyles and more concerned with intellect and accomplishment. *Home* describes a charitable New England home that is founded on education and is successful only by influence. Charles, one of the Barclay sons, is encouraged to pursue a job in agriculture after his traditional studies ruin his vigor. In support of Charles' change in studies, William advises him, "when life is a burden for the possessor, it is not apt to very profitable to anybody else" (133). In order to continue to be useful, Charles does not abandon his intellectual studies, but rather redirects his learning toward agricultural education.

According to Sedgwick, if the model home acknowledges the importance of all roles within a society, it should be equally concerned with charity and attending to those in need. When the Barclay family becomes the victim of fraud by the devious son of Norton, William's own business partner, they respond with kindness, not anger. Norton dies from the shock in response to the devastation that his son has caused, leaving the other two children of the house without a guardian. Harry, Norton's youngest son, becomes a business partner of the Barclays and Emily, Norton's daughter, is brought to live with the Barclays. Through the Barclays' guidance and education, Emily is transformed from a "hateful girl" to a desired governess. Their success illustrates the influence of domestic sphere on children.

This domestic, charitable home is also a distinctly Christian home. Christian charity and influence are what allow the success of Sedgwick's ideal republican society. Unlike *A New England Tale*, which is strongly anti-Calvinist, Sedgwick's didactic tales do not chastise a certain denomination. Except for the mention of "joyless Shakers," Sedgwick's religious views extend to different denominations that promote fundamentally good societal influence (131). Sedgwick however, elevates Christianity to be the driving force of all morally good characters. In *Home*, the Christian spirit enables Mr. Barclay to overcome hardship. Mrs. Barclay notes "how he has returned good for evil, and overcome evil with good!" (119). Mr. Barclay not only corrects corruption through exercising Christian values, but sets an example for his children to follow, successfully influencing others to act this way.

The Barclays continue to be charitable throughout the novel. As we learn from Mary, one of the daughters, the Barclay family collectively spends each Sunday educating and caring for "father's families" (73). These are families that need community support, so Mr. Barclay advises them through Christian charity. The children of these families join the Barclay children to

practice drawing and self-reflection, while the parents receive guidance from William. A large part of Sedgwick's envisioned home is deeply Christian, but charity is the most important of those Christian family values. Christian influence demands charitable involvement, and so the family is able to improve community, in turn shaping society. The act of educating community members on Sundays supports this prioritization of charity. Sedgwick consistently illustrates the effects of her envisioned family on the larger society. As a result of Mary's description of the Barclays' charity work, another character is influenced to do the same. This connection to the home—as a place for not only familial growth and instruction, but for community work—is revisited throughout Sedgwick's tale. By educating others and influencing community members, the Barclays encourage social change. Through this portrayal, Sedgwick highlights the importance of the home within the larger context of community.

Another element of a successful society is its commitment to social progress. In *Home* Sedgwick negotiates the relationship to the past to support a progressive – or forward-looking, always improving—society. For example, throughout the novel Charles strives to improve the Greenbrook home in anticipation of the Barclays' return. The narrator describes Charles' efforts: “He felt an interest that never abated, in the improvement of the farm [Greenbrook], and in beautifying it for the residence of the family” (134). Toward the end of the novel, the family moves back to the farm that Charles has been renovating and William has been missing deeply. However, the family cannot simply return to their old home in Greenbrook without modernizing it. Through Sedgwick's illustration of this return to the past, she negates the feasibility of a return to a simpler time. The physical attributes of the location itself must be changed; the intellect of the people returning must be improved. It is no longer the same place, because we can never

return to the same place. The characters' symbolic inability to return to a pre-revolutionary society reminds readers in the new Republic of the necessity and value of progression.

In addition, the family's return to the country illustrates the need for urban and rural communities to learn from one another— lessons which are nurtured and disseminated from the home. The Barclays bring a new perspective to Greenbrook, one gained from living in the city. William speaks of a sense of community that is lacking in the city but persistent in rural areas. He claims, "In the country the tie of human brotherhood is felt through the circle, the social electric chain is bound so closely that the vibration of every touch is felt. We not only sympathize with the great joys and sorrows of our neighbors, but in all the little circumstances that make up life" (140). Here Sedgwick carefully illustrates a contrast between rural and city life. Rather than suggest the city supports a progressive society, she highlights the lack of innovation. William continues to highlight the faults of living in the city, explaining "I confess that in this matter of society, I have been somewhat disappointed. There has not been so rapid an improvement as I expected; but we must have patience. It takes time to change the forms of society; to give new direction to a current that has been wearing into its channel for centuries" (142). Sedgwick suggests that society can be improved only through positive, communitarian influences from within the home.

In exploring the influence of the private sphere on the public and political, Sedgwick again participates in a political conversation central to her time. According to scholar Shirley Samuels, Andrew Jackson acknowledged the connection between the private and public in the time of Sedgwick's writing. In Jackson's Farewell Address, he claims "the Constitution cannot be maintained, nor the Union preserved ... by the mere exertion of the coercive powers confined to the General Government. The foundations must be laid in the affections of the people ... in the

fraternal attachments which citizens ... bear to one another as members of one political family” (16). Throughout *Home* Sedgwick suggests that the public sphere cannot function without the cooperation and collaboration of the people. Arguing for the importance of the private sphere, Sedgwick claims that “society will only be an extension of the intercourse of home” (142). In her envisioned society, the political sphere is merely an extension of the home, consisting of the intellectual intercourse which builds society. Making home—a place maintained by women—the center of the novel and the center of society, Sedgwick confirms women’s important role in the private sphere. She does not argue for independence from the domestic sphere, but suggests that the domestic sphere is the foundation of American society.

Sedgwick’s envisioned society is complete with the Barclays’ influence extending west to a new community. In the conclusion of the novel Charles moves to Ohio, bringing along his values of Christian charity and communitarianism. Charles’ relocation supports a vision of New England influence on the new frontier. This relocation also supports Sedgwick’s imagined family as an instrument of social control. The Barclays now have an influence on a new settlement, one where “the physical, moral, and intellectual soil is ready; it only wants the spirit of cultivation” (168).

For a complete view of Sedgwick’s successful society, I will turn to another novel in her didactic trilogy, *Live and Let Live: Domestic Service Illustrated*. As relayed by the subtitle, this novel is a tale of one domestic servant, Lucy, and the challenges she faces from her employers. This didactic tale is not a guide for the domestic servant, but rather is directed toward the upper-class employers. Through a series of juxtaposed characters Sedgwick highlights both the proper treatment and the intolerable conditions of domestics. In an effort to counter the exploitation of domestic workers and highlight the class differences inherent to the early Republic, Sedgwick

envisioning an alternative, ideal society. Although all three didactic tales discuss the topic of social class, this novel is largely focused on social class relations and the obligations of the upper and lower classes.

The tale begins with a brief backstory introducing the main character Lucy, who is sent to service after her father has brought the family to near starvation with his drinking. Sedgwick's portrayal of the once-middle class family now facing downward social mobility engages the readers' sentiment. The cruelty of the mistresses, Lucy's various employers, also engages sentimental techniques. While searching for domestic work, Lucy faces rejection when Mrs. Sadwell refuses her service because she has had a foundational education in a poor home, and too much would have to be "unlearned" for her to be successful (22). Later in the novel, however, it is Lucy's foundational education—what she learned from her mother at home—that enables her to be a model for other community members in a decent employer's home. However, before finding a suitable employer, Lucy finds work in many unpleasant households. Through Lucy's challenges Sedgwick both illustrates the frequent exploitation of domestics and the agency of those domestics to evade the inadequate conditions.

The first of Lucy's employers is Mrs. Broadson, whose "domestic labors were now limited to getting the greatest possible service for the least possible compensation" (44). This often includes hiring German servants who have no familiarity with the language to work for half the pay. When Lucy is hired, she lives in unbearable conditions and is worked till her clothes are worn with holes. Mrs. Broadson forbids Lucy's visits home, limiting the time spent with her disabled brother Jemie. As in *Home*, Sedgwick addresses the influences of the private sphere in this novel, illustrating the neglect that is a consequence of Lucy's restricted visits to her

own home. Both Jemmie and Lucy suffer as a result—Jemmie lacking the interaction with his sister and Lucy lacking the education she once received at home.

Lucy eventually leaves the Broadsons but not in response to their unfair treatment. Lucy makes the decision to leave this home because she is taking the room and position from Judy, a dying young Irish immigrant. Judy is the niece of Bridget, another domestic servant in the home who was unwelcoming to Lucy upon her arrival. Bridget's meanness is explained by her tragic backstory of immigrating to America alone to support her only remaining family member, Judy. Lucy learns that Judy had been promised the position before she sought the job; Lucy must leave in order to do the right thing. Upon leaving, Lucy claims: "well mother was right—we can, if we try hard, overcome evil with good, and we can get people to love us if we make the most of our opportunities" (70). Lucy is guided by her own judgment and morality to do good.

This insistent need to help others and promote good actions, often discussed in *Home*, is revisited in *Live and Let Live*. Though Lucy has a starving family of her own to support, she decides to give her position to Judy who rightfully deserves it. Sedgwick counters the prejudice faced by Irish immigrants with this sympathetic portrayal of Bridget and Judy. Sedgwick herself was sympathetic to the Irish immigrants, as she writes in her own autobiography *The Power of Her Sympathy*: "the Irish, by the infusion of an element of warmth and generosity into our national character, will have done us more good than evil ... they are willing servants—they are sympathetic and progressive" (51-52).

The worst of Lucy's employers is undoubtedly Mrs. Hartell, whose main purpose in the novel is to illustrate a truly corrupt mistress. The nature of her corruption is in her inability to be empathetic. Only thinking of herself, Mrs. Hartell withholds one of her domestics' promised wages. Due to Mrs. Hartell's "thoughtlessness" and "culpable inconsiderateness" Margery, the

domestic servant, is unable to feed her child resulting in his death. Morally corrupt and dismissive of her domestics' humanity, Mrs. Hartell is unable to keep a happy and well run home. Her children are taught by French servants, as "she never even thought of preparing the minds and manners of her children for the state of society in which they were to live, or of adapting her own conduct to the actual duties of her conditions" (153). She is neglectful of not only the conditions of her domestics, but the well being of her own children too. Mrs. Hartell's faults lie entirely in her failure to acknowledge the needs of others.

The several flawed homes in the novel effectively highlight the positive qualities of the two ideal homes. Mrs. Hyde, a mistress who in whose home "all members were governed by the same physical laws," treats Lucy as a member of the family. Mrs. Hyde thinks of her domestics not only in relation to the work that they will complete, but as women who will go on to have homes of their own after their service in her household. Because she holds this empathetic view of her domestics, they are treated more like students than servants. Mrs. Hyde explains to Lucy that she does not confine any of her domestics to one duty, but instructs them in all domestic labors "so they should have that sort of education that will enable them to make their own homes prosperous and happy" (188). Mrs. Hyde certainly has a different approach than the cruel and incompetent mistresses that previously employed Lucy. She views domestics as women of a community that will eventually have an influence on a larger sphere.

Through this portrayal Sedgwick suggest these women will be pioneers for societal influence, if not social change. A chambermaid of the house shows Lucy to her room upon arrival. She directs Lucy to the bookshelf, claiming "see this shelf of books; not the Bible only, but a whole row, to instruct and entertain too—and what is more, she [Mrs. Hyde] loves to have you get the time to enjoy yourself reading; and the long and the short of it is, that she and all her

children seem to have a realizing sense that their help have minds and hearts as well as they” (190). As Martha notices, Mrs. Hyde is an exceptional employer, allowing and encouraging an education for her domestics. Sedgwick again insists on the importance of female education, demanding literacy for women and domestics within the home.

Throughout the novel Sedgwick expands the influence of domestic workers within the home. Mr. Hyde refers to Lucy as an example for his children because of the knowledge she shares with everyone. When Lucy answers a question directed to one of the Hydes’ children, Mr. Hyde remarks, “you see that, by keeping your eyes and ears open, you may get knowledge on every hand, and communicate it” (196). From the foundational education she received at home, one suited for her brother, Lucy is able to impact the minds of others at the home where she now resides. Lucy not only gained a foundational education at home, but is encouraged to “communicate it” effectively extending her influence within the private sphere. In the Hyde home, domestics are a part of “a kind of partnership” which contrasts the authoritarian mistresses that employed Lucy previously (191).

This partnership between employer and employee is sustained through the commitment of the mistress to education. Stressing the necessity of a partnership that transcends class, Mrs. Hyde asserts:

“But I do not know how there can well be a higher pursuit than the improvement and happiness of those who are placed by Providence in those little primary schools, over which we, as mothers and mistresses, preside. Let us try to train our girls for this their happiest sphere—to prepare them to be the ministers of Providence to the more ignorant children of the human family” (92).

Sedgwick situates female education as not only the social duty of the upper class employers, but as a religious duty as well. Always concerned with influence—as in both *Home* and *The Rich Poor Man and the Poor Rich Man*, which I discuss later in this chapter—Sedgwick illustrates the importance of education through the influence of these women on society. Again we can note her tempered progressivist approach to expanding women’s roles: because these lower class women can and will experience upward mobility, it is important to educate them to do good in the approaching future of the Republic.

Lucy’s character embodies many democratic ideas that were central to forming the new nation. Specifically, Lucy represents the social mobility available to people of the Republic. Sedgwick includes Lucy’s troublesome backstory of a social status decline to address a real concern within the Republic. As scholar Sarah Robbins claims, the early nineteenth century capitalist marketplace made families’ economic status insecure; families could easily fall from high or middle class to poor through a husband’s illness, injury or death (11). Or, perhaps, a family could face a decline in social status through a husband prioritizing vices over necessities, as Sedgwick illustrates with Lucy’s father. Writing of benevolent literacy narratives, the genre in which Robbins places Sedgwick’s work, she notes “these narratives carefully allowed for the possibility that virtuous poor women and their children could maintain an admirable social status based on learning and morality, as distinct from a purportedly less significant ranking based on the family’s economic situation” (12). The decline that the Lee family faces in *Live and Let Live* is a real concern for women in the Republic. What Sedgwick illustrates throughout the novel is that social class mobility is both possible and attainable alternative for these families.

It is important to note that at the beginning of the novel, the family’s fall is through no fault of Lucy or Mrs. Lee, the figure of Republican motherhood. Rather, it is due to Mr. Lee’s

negligence, the figure of paternal authority and control, that Lucy is obliged to find work as a domestic. Because Lucy spends the entire novel rebuilding what her father lost, Sedgwick suggests that recovery is possible through hard work and morality. In the conclusion of the novel Lucy marries Charles, the son of Mrs. Lovett, a former employer who, like Mrs. Hyde, encouraged her domestic education. Lucy acknowledges that all of the work that she has done has been for building a comfortable life for her family. In the final chapter Lucy writes to her mother, "Our house is nearly done and large enough for us all. The ladies in the village will have plenty of work for the girls' millinery and dressmaking establishment, and dear Jemmie will keep Charles's books, and all of us will be in a way to earn an honourable living" (212). Lucy successfully moves from the poor class and raises her family's social status as well. Through hard work and morality, upward social mobility can be achieved. Sedgwick and many other early American writers illustrate this social mobility in their writing, supporting a democratic idea prominent throughout the founding of the nation. Sedgwick however, positions this mobility through the success of a female character, rather than the success of a son of a poor family as traditionally illustrated.

As in *Home*, Sedgwick envisions an ideal which has an impact on the Republican society. In *Live and Let Live* Sedgwick extends this vision even further and details a future for the Republic: "Surely the time will come in this country, where the elements of general prosperity have not been destroyed by the foolish combinations and wicked monopolies of men...when physical, intellectual, and moral education will have raised the level of our race, and brought it to as near an approximation to equality of condition as it is capable of in its present state of existence" (72). In a more progressive, but still conservative idea, Sedgwick suggests that a

crucial element in social change can be executed through education. Sedgwick places the responsibility of this influence “in the power of every *mistress* of a family” (72).

Lucy’s influence extends not only to the community around her, but further west to a new frontier. Much like Charles’ relocation in *Home*, Lucy and Charles move to Ohio in the concluding chapters of *Live and Let Live*, bringing with them their New England influence. Charles brings the family bread-making business to the Western frontier, expanding both business and societal influence to new areas of the nation.

The third didactic novel in Sedgwick’s trilogy, *The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man*, also highlights the social class mobility possible in the new nation. In this novel however, the main focus is on the moral virtue of people within various social classes. As the title suggests, Sedgwick questions the popular perceptions of the poor class by constructing a family that has little wealth but is rich in morality and charity. She illustrates morally corrupt wealthy characters in contrast to those moral poor characters to question the success of the classes. Sedgwick does not question the rightness of the classes themselves, but illustrates national class divisions. The morality of the class members is what determines their “rich” or “poor” state of life rather than their economic status. Sedgwick doesn’t condemn a material, class-based hierarchy; she merely suggests Americans reexamine the fairness of this social structure.

The novel begins with three characters that are rewarded books as prizes, which Sedgwick uses to foreshadow their situations throughout the novel. Harry Aikin, the main character, chooses the Bible, while Morris Finely chooses *The History of Birds*, and Paulina Clark trades her book for a pink hair bow. The novel continues to illustrate the lives of each character in their respective social classes. As the book choices foretold, Harry is the most moral character, though having little wealth: the “rich poor man.” Morris is the most materialistic,

morally corrupt character: the “poor rich man.” Leaving Paulina Clark to be the most unfortunate character, married to a man who makes counterfeit money, and has no charitable people around when she is in need.

Placing morality at the forefront of the novel, Sedgwick suggests the moral system of the novel is a model for American society. Those that support and reflect Christian sentiments become successful members of society, though not necessarily the wealthiest. After a failed business attempt in New York, the Aikin family is described as “undeniably what the world calls poor. But they had affection, intelligence, temperance, contentment, and godliness” (75). Juxtaposed with the Aikins are the Finleys, who are described as “selfish and ostentatious, with unfurnished minds, and hearts as empty as their purses were full” (76). These two families continue to model these qualities as examples of moral wealth and material wealth, successfully situating the focus of the novel on whether financial status or virtuous character is the basis for success.

Both families are presented with the opportunity to help a poor stranger in need. Mr. Barlow, the stranger, is stumbling down the road in search of his lost daughter. The narrator explains, “his health was broken, his heart gone, and his little stock of money expended to the last farthing. Hunger had driven him forth to seek employment to support a life that had become a burden to him” (90). Morris Finley refuses to help Mr. Barlow, abiding by the rule he made for himself to “never give to strangers” (91). A merchant nearby gives the poor man money, claiming, “I have money, but no time to give” (92). Finally, Harry Aikin, though having no money, gives the most important contribution to the suffering stranger—a home. Harry welcomes the stranger without reluctance, serving as a model of Christian charity for his children. Through the narrator, Sedgwick highlights Harry’s influence, claiming he “hit on the

right and only sure mode of teaching goodness,” one done through example (93). Similar to the other didactic tales, *The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man* supports the vision of a morally just family that relies on education and influence. While the merchant’s financial charity is both needed and appreciated, it does not have same influence as the Aikin family. As they welcome Mr. Barlow into their home, he becomes a recipient of both their charity and influence. Sedgwick suggests that this moral guidance is the most important and the most influential standard in antebellum society.

Sedgwick continues to distance the moral status of characters from their economic status, insisting that the poor have a moral “richness” that the upper class does not. Harry Aikin, in conversation with his wife, explains that they benefit from the charity they showed Mr. Barlow: “and I think, Susan, we take as much pleasure in seeing him refreshed at our table, as the rich do in their dinner parties. To tell the truth, Susan, though I suppose no one but you would believe it, I never did wish to change conditions with them” (95). Though the rich can afford the extravagance of dinner parties, the Aikins desire a life of sufficiency. Joe Shapiro, one of the few scholars to discuss Sedgwick’s didactic tales, notes that she is offering a “bald version” of the common antebellum notion that being poor allows for a spiritual richness that enables generosity (207). Sedgwick does illustrate this antebellum idea which supports the validity of inherent class differences. She reasons that these class differences allow reciprocity and enable all Christian virtues to be at work.

However, she also extends their influence beyond the private sphere. The Aikens’ charitable influence extends to the children within their family, but also to the public, making their Christian virtues a model for a larger audience. After providing Mr. Barlow with a home, they give him a job as a teacher which allows him to give lectures to the children of the

neighborhood. Much like in the two didactic novels discussed previously, Sedgwick insists that education is the single most important value of influence. When Susan Aikin suggests that the family should help Juliet, a fellow tenant in their building, she claims education will be the most enduring charity they can provide. When Susan suggests that Juliet become a part of Mr. Barlow's class, she explains that "the warm garments would only be a present comfort, but a good done to her mind would be lasting" (102).

Sedgwick is conscious of the power of influence throughout the majority of her fictional writing, although it is especially apparent in these didactic tales. As Sedgwick illustrates the Aikins as a conduit for social influence, the contrasting Finleys have no influence within the community. Their lack of influence is a result of their immoral and selfish ways. The family refuses to support Morris Finley's mother-in-law when she is in need of a home. As a result, their friends do not attend their dinner party later in the novel. With little familial or friendly connections, the Finleys are denied the social influence that the Aikins have – Sedgwick's ideal society can only grow only through good actions. The Finleys' limited influence reflects her ideas on social class separation. Those that are materialistic-centered, like the Finleys, lack influence within the community.

Each novel in Sedgwick's trilogy focuses on a different element of American society, collectively supporting the democratic values of the new nation. Specifically, they address gender, class, religion, the political structure and the role of the past through a domestic lens. These novels do not re-vision Republican womanhood with a conceptualization of female independence, but rather highlight how women's influence within the private domestic sphere shapes the larger public sphere. Sedgwick discusses, thoughtfully, the condition of the nation and

the condition for women in her didactic literature, shaping a part of American culture, the culture of domesticity previously ignored by scholars.

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