

# A Laudable Ambition Fired Her Soul Conduct Fiction Helps Define Republican Womanhood, Female Communities, And Women's Education In The Works Of Judith Sargent Murray, Hannah Webster Foster, And Susanna Haswell Rowson

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“A LAUDABLE AMBITION FIRED HER SOUL”: CONDUCT FICTION HELPS  
DEFINE REPUBLICAN WOMANHOOD, FEMALE COMMUNITIES, AND WOMEN’S  
EDUCATION IN THE WORKS OF JUDITH SARGENT MURRAY, HANNAH WEBSTER  
FOSTER, AND SUSANNA HASWELL ROWSON

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the major works of Judith Sargent Murray, Hannah Webster Foster, and Susanna Haswell Rowson, three major writers of the 1790s whose writing responds to the ideologies of the early American Republic. I suggest that Murray, Foster, and Rowson write conduct fiction which responds to the changing attitudes toward women and education after the American Revolution.

Using fiction, these authors comment on the republican woman, the need for women's education, and the necessity for women to gather in communities for support. Despite the prevailing notion that reading too many novels would corrupt young women, Judith Sargent Murray's novella, *The Story of Margaretta* (1786), Hannah Webster Foster's novels, *The Coquette* (1797) and *The Boarding School* (1798), and Susanna Rowson's novels, *Charlotte Temple* (1794) and *Reuben and Rachel; or, Tales of Old Times* (1798), were some of the most popular books in the late eighteenth century. If these novels were not meant to be read by young women, who were the authors' primary audience, why were they so popular? This project situates these questions in the political environment the authors were writing in to show that a relationship exists between what women were reading and how authors of conduct fiction helped facilitate the changing roles of women in the early Republic.

For Mark, the steadfast rock on which my waves crash

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## INTRODUCTION

Novels are the favourite, and the most dangerous kind of reading ... They often pervert the judgment, mislead the affections, and blind the understanding.

Hannah Webster Foster, *The Boarding School*

Cathy Davidson's study of the novel in early America tells us much about the history of the book in the early Republic. As America was "attempting to define itself" after the Revolution, it was also "attempting to constitute itself ... against revolution abroad and dissent at home" (*Revolution* 70). Davidson calls the novel, "a perfect form for this imperfect time" because it fell under attack from all parts of the early Republic and faithfully represents "the turbulence of the era" (71). Since periodicals, biographies, nonfiction, and history were considered reading that would cultivate and expand the mind, and since books were considered luxury items and not often bought, the novel did not gain ground in popularity until the advent of circulation libraries (Davidson, *Revolution* 87-88). Davidson believes that "the demand for reading became more widespread, especially among women of all classes and workers of both sexes" once circulation libraries were established (88). But even then the novel was threatening to replace elite literature, making critics of the time concerned that it would change the reading habits of the nation (105). At the radical level, novels might persuade the "underprivileged in the emerging society" that they "had a voice" and were able to "lead followers to riot and ruin," effectively giving the early Republic's elite a platform with which to express disdain for the novel (105-09). Disdain for the novel was rooted far deeper than politics. Critics sought to censure women as well, especially because they were the "implied reader[s] of most of the fiction of the era" (110). In order to "control female minds and feminine sexuality, the novel ...

had to be kept out of the wrong hands,” meaning out of women’s hands entirely (111). Novels and romances would, as the epigraph above shows, only mislead and blind citizens, especially women, from making fruitful life choices. Nevertheless novels were popular reading choices in the eighteenth century. Many women in the early Republic read novels and romances in addition to nonfiction.

Despite the prevailing notion that reading too many novels would corrupt young women, Judith Sargent Murray’s novella, *The Story of Margaretta* (1786), Hannah Webster Foster’s novels, *The Coquette* (1797) and *The Boarding School* (1798), and Susanna Rowson’s novels, *Charlotte Temple* (1794) and *Reuben and Rachel; or, Tales of Old Times* (1798) were some of the most popular books in the late eighteenth century. If these novels were not meant to be read by young women, their primary audience, why were they so popular? This project situates these questions in the political environment the authors were writing in to show that authors of conduct fiction helped facilitate the changing roles of women in early Republic. Because of the popularity of conduct books during this time, I believe that Murray, Foster, and Rowson chose to write conduct fiction, a hybrid novel that combined both the characteristics of sentimental and advice literature. This choice complicated the political ideology of republican motherhood.<sup>1</sup>

Murray, Foster, and Rowson were the most prominent authors of conduct fiction during the early Republic. Their writing careers prove that women can contribute to the nation in more meaningful ways than through the domestic sphere. Their interest in women’s education and participation in republican ideology give them ample opportunity to help change the way

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<sup>1</sup> For more a more in-depth analysis of the conduct book in early America, see Cathy Davidson’s *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*, especially chapter two “The Book in the New Republic”; Weyler 51, 52, 55; and Hayes 59-79. For an intricate analysis of British conduct literature that applies to the genre as a whole, see Jones.

American women educated themselves. Judith Sargent Murray wrote many essays on the treatment and education of women under the pseudonym “The Gleaner” in *Massachusetts Magazine*. Hannah Webster Foster, though not directly involved in women’s education, wrote *The Boarding School*, part conduct manual and part epistolary novel, in order to educate women on the proper conduct of good, republican women. Susanna Rowson opened Mrs. Rowson’s Young Ladies Academy in Boston and became involved in educating young women at the turn of the nineteenth century. In addition to fiction, she also wrote several textbooks for her students, including a geography textbook as well as a speller.<sup>2</sup> Since Murray, Foster, and Rowson advocated women’s education, we might expect their novels to influence women’s sensibilities and time management skills. This study will prove that these novels act as conduct fiction and allow their female readers to assess in safety the repercussions of virtue-less women by reading a book rather than through personal experience.

Kevin Hayes describes the conduct book as “a voice refracted through the framework of early American society” (59). We can extend this definition to conduct fiction as well. This hybrid genre was unique to the late eighteenth century and particularly popular in America. Sarah Emily Newton, often attributed with being the first to use the phrase “conduct fiction” believes the genre to be “[w]ritten for a predominantly female audience” and often uses a “trial/initiation motif by which female characters are tested, judged, rewarded, or punished by conduct book standards of virtue and right behavior” while, more importantly, “provid[ing] a

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<sup>2</sup> For more detailed scholarship on Murray, Foster and Rowson see Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*; Gwendolyn Foster; Ginsberg; Hamilton; Harris; Jacoba; Kritzer; Newton; Pettengill; Rust; Schiff; Skemp; Smith-Rosenberg; West; Weyler; and Zagarri. Also see Melissa Homestead, “Susanna Rowson’s Transatlantic Career,” *Early American Literature* 45.3 (2010): 619-54; Eve Tavor Bannet, “Immigrant Fictions: Matthew Carey, Susanna Rowson, and Charlotte Temple in Philadelphia,” *Age of Johnson* 19 (2009): 239-72; and Jennifer Harris, “Writing Vice: Hannah Webster Foster and *The Coquette*,” *Canadian Review of American Studies* 39.4 (2009): 363-81.

unique insight into how fiction was used to serve cultural purposes” (140). Not only do these novels educate women about virtue but they respond directly to the outcomes of the American Revolution, especially the new republic’s emphasis on education as central to preserving the republican way of life. Women became republican mothers, the educators of America’s future and models of virtue for their families. But, as this project will prove, these authors are also in conversation with discourses of the American Revolution, the new republic’s emphasis on education and republican motherhood, and the shifting roles of women, especially with regard to their relationships with one another in later part of the eighteenth century.

### Theoretical Framework

Scholars have only recently begun to address conduct fiction in the early Republic. This scholarship rarely addresses the changing nature of women’s education or the larger changing attitudes toward republican motherhood expressed in late eighteenth-century conduct fiction. I focus simultaneously on the change in the novel and the change in women’s education during the 1790s. My analysis explores the growing support for women’s education as a direct response to the changing social ideals garnered after the American Revolution. I focus on incorporating feminist studies and Bakhtinian dialogics into this study as a way of showing that the novel influences the changing practices of women’s education at the end of the eighteenth century through women’s conduct fiction.

To show the relationship between the rise of the novel and the social changes of the late eighteenth century, I turn to Mikhail Bakhtin and his seminal work, *The Dialogic Imagination*, to explore the relationship between the conduct novel and other novels of the time period. He

argues that the novel as a genre “is both critical and self-critical,” a point which, when applied to conduct fiction, exposes its criticism of early American culture as well as its criticism of its contemporary genres. Dialogism is also particularly important to Bakhtin’s theory of the novel because he suggests that all communication, written or spoken, is in “constant interaction,” both critical and self-critical, both informed by other novels at the same time it is informing its predecessors (426). I use this theory to show that the rise of the novel during the 1790s exposes the social conditions constraining women’s education. This issue and will be explored in chapter two.

Within feminist studies, I am influenced by what Rosemarie Tong calls “radical feminism,” which emphasizes the relationships among women through a process called “consciousness raising,” a term used to characterize early feminist movements of the twentieth century, in which women “com[e] together in small groups” to “share their personal experiences *as women* with each other” (author’s emphasis, 48). Consciousness raising is a good parallel to late eighteenth century female communities, which I examine extensively in chapter three. Tong suggests that women are “[e]mpowered by the realization that women’s fates were profoundly linked” (49). Although the women in this thesis did not live in the 1960s and 1970s, as the women Tong analyzes, the same principles can be applied to Murray, Foster, and Rowson’s female characters. They represent early American women’s daily lives, loves, and struggles, reflecting the issues of the day for the women readers who vicariously live them. Together, these women characters find solace in one another, comfort one another, and form a community together that is able to give the necessary love and support to each other in order to be successful women. These communities often emphasized femininity and domesticity, but others, like the

fictional communities in Murray's and Rowson's works, question the very social mores that brought them together to begin with.

I do not seek to rewrite the history of the socio-political changes of the new republic. Many scholars have done this before me. However, I do build upon their work to suggest a new paradigm for considering the conduct novel's function within women's education and rights discourse. I pay particular attention to Kerber's text, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America*, which examines the roles of women during the war, the changes in the country that shaped female educational practices, and women's overall place in society. I also rely on Mary Kelley's influential work, *Learning to Stand and Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic*, which shows the relationships among women, liberal learning, and civic virtue in early America.

#### Early American Women and Their Importance to Literature

This project reinforces the importance of works by Judith Sargent Murray, Hannah Webster Foster, and Susanna Haswell Rowson, post-Revolutionary women who were not silent partners in the new nation. They contributed to the burgeoning national identity by educating other women through their writing by urging them to consider education for themselves. Post-revolutionary America saw a boom in the formation of female academies as republican womanhood took root within the country. Women were expected to guide the members of their household in morality and education so the new nation could rely on the educated population to help build the country. This, of course, meant that women must be educated to some degree themselves.

Overall, I believe that this thesis is important to the study of early American literature because it asserts that the literature of the late eighteenth century is more than just sentimental nonsense that would corrupt those who spent too much time reading it. This literature acts as conduct fiction, meant as an educational tool for the women who were able to read it. It depicts women who fall prey to scandalous lovers and defy social norms, hardly good examples for young women, yet that is exactly what these authors use it for. In a counter-intuitive act, Murray, Foster, and Rowson use seduction and scandal to display to their readers how *not* to act, forcing their audience to think, to reason, and to make conclusions on their characters before passing judgment. But, the authors also depict strong female characters who take charge of their destinies, ultimately changing the way readers perceive women. In reading the lessons learned from characters who suffer, young women may have been less likely to be influenced by the same situations that befall their beloved characters. In addition, reading about strong communities of women, which are often present in the works of these authors, enabled women to recognize the importance of participating within their own female communities. These communities alleviated the isolation felt from the push back from the public interaction they faced during the war to the separate, domestic sphere once the war ended.

Women are woefully under-represented in the American canon, a fact which many scholars have been rectifying over the last 20-30 years.<sup>3</sup> This study seeks to reaffirm Murray, Foster, and Rowson's position in the canon and to present an analysis of their major works with their minor works as a way of contributing to the growing number of scholars who believe that

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<sup>3</sup> Historians such as Kerber and Zagarri give voices to otherwise forgotten women in their books. In addition, Sharon Harris, recovers manuscripts for use by the literary community.

studying early American women's literature is an integral part of understanding not only American literature as a whole, but American culture in general.

### Chapter Outline of Thesis

In chapter one, I examine how Enlightenment thought influenced women's cultural place before, during, and after the American Revolution. Women's roles were in constant flux and women were becoming progressively more involved in politics during the Revolution. After the war, however, they were encouraged back into the home. However, as the chapter will prove, women only complicated republican motherhood and simultaneously created new opportunities for themselves in the educational arena. In addition, I examine the impact Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication on the Rights of Woman* made on early American women's rights discourse, suggesting that the authors in question were very familiar with her treatise and used her principles in their own writing.

In chapter two, I examine *The Story of Margaretta* by Judith Sargent Murray and *The Boarding School* by Hannah Webster Foster, showing how education can both reinforce the status quo and show the public that women's education can enhance their positions as republican mothers and active participants in the nation. I examine the way Murray treats education in the early Republic and suggest that rather than troubling the status quo by suggesting that republican motherhood is ultimately negative, she takes a middle ground when it comes to educating women. I also examine the way the text comments on the acceptable reading habits of women. Margaretta is exposed to many different genres of books, including fiction, which Mr. Vigilius questions. I suggest that Murray's representation of the novel illuminates the changing opinion of

fiction in the new Republic, changing from a potential negative influence on the less educated classes to fictional accounts of middle-class citizens using reason to guide them through difficult situations. In addition to *The Story of Margaretta*, I argue that Hannah Webster Foster uses education differently from Murray in her writing, yet ultimately for the same purpose. *The Boarding School* establishes Foster's opinion that female academies should teach ornamental subjects like letter writing, dancing, and needlework over intellectual subjects like history, geography, and arithmetic as represented in *The Story of Margaretta*. However, *The Boarding School* suggests Foster's tacit approval and validation of republican womanhood in the post-graduate letters among her characters. By using conduct fiction as their means, these authors show two different opinions on women's education, yet ultimately agree that education by any means, domestic or otherwise, are an important step in the evolution of women and their roles as citizens in early America.

In chapter three, I argue that Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* and Foster's *The Coquette* use conduct fiction to describe relationships among women and the importance of female communities to women after the revolution. Rowson and Foster emphasize harmful, unsupportive, and unsisterly female communities as a way to show the importance of sisterhood during such a turbulent social time. In *Charlotte Temple*, Charlotte's tragic fate is sealed by her trust in the wrong people and by her parents' failure to inspire filial duty in their daughter. Eliza in *The Coquette*, however, chooses to disregard the advice of her mother and close friends for a life with seducer and rake, Peter Sanford. Rowson and Foster both advocate for women to have close relationships with other women. More importantly, they want women to participate in healthy female communities whose members subscribe to the tenets of republican womanhood.

Finally, chapter four presents the culmination of these ideas in Susanna Rowson's text, *Reuben and Rachel; or, Tales of Old Times*, a text which not only addresses women's education and female communities in the conduct novel genre, but also addresses equality in the early nation. I suggest that Rowson wrote this text as a way of gleaning America's future from its present course. It is a thoughtful way to wrap up this study because it shows the novel's rise from sentimental conduct fiction to a multi-faceted work that brings the genre closer than ever toward the discussion of a national literature.

## **CHAPTER ONE –WOMEN’S EDUCATION AND RIGHTS DISCOURSE IN THE EARLY REPUBLIC: NEGOTIATING WOMEN’S POLITICAL PLACE IN THE NATION AFTER THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION**

Before I can analyze Murray, Foster and Rowson’s work as conduct fiction, this chapter will contextualize the historical backdrop of the American woman’s experience in order to theorize how the revolution shaped and changed women’s experience, education, and rights in the early nation. Scholars who focus on the impact of the American Revolution on women believe that the war brought women a new set of responsibilities in addition to their duties as homemaker, wife, and mother, which ultimately “marked a watershed in the popular perceptions of women’s relationship to the state” (Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash* 22). As Rosemarie Zagarri explains, the Whig leaders of the colonies understood that “their resistance to Britain depended on their ability to mobilize popular support,” which included women because they would be “critical to the resistance movement against Britain and could affect the course of the war” (22). Zagarri also contends that the Enlightenment influenced many men to believe that “women had an equal capacity to reason” and must be “won over to the cause” in the same manner as all the skeptical men in the country (22). Because the war effort relied so strongly on women’s support, it became necessary to “reach out to women in a direct, widespread, and public fashion” asking them to boycott everything from “luxury goods” and “drinking British tea” and to “produce homemade textiles and clothing” to end the colonies reliance upon British manufactured goods (23).

They responded better than anyone could have imagined. They not only abided by the boycotts but also sewed shirts for the troops and went door to door collecting for the war effort.

In an even more dramatic effort, the women of Litchfield, Connecticut, made over forty thousand ammunition cartridges after a statue of George III was toppled by a gang of impassioned, independence-seeking men (23). What women learned was that they had a direct “impact on the course of the war itself” (23). When men answered the call to arms, women were left to “take over their duties on the farm, in business, and within the family,” often with “little prior training or experience in supervising these matters” (23). Indeed, the Revolution gave women entrance into politics and suddenly made them visible in a world where they were largely invisible (26).

However, the term, “women’s rights,” had little if any, meaning at all. Zagarri suggests that “[w]omen’s assertion of rights might subvert the gender hierarchy and threaten the subordination of women to men” (43). There is an inherent power struggle involved when discussing women’s place in revolutionary and post-revolutionary America. We must understand that post-revolutionary America “is the story of how American women and men sought to define – and ultimately limit and restrict – the expansive ideals they had so successfully deployed against Britain” rather than limiting our thinking to just the positive changes that occurred in “women’s rights” during the American Revolution (4).

#### The Making of Republican Mothers: Women in Post-Revolutionary America

After the Revolution, women gave up their newfound responsibilities because the nation demanded new roles for them, roles that did not dictate independence, but roles that advocated for better educational opportunities. In order for “the new republic to survive, all citizens must be educated in reason and virtue” because “the husbands of educated women would be more

virtuous” and “their children would be educated to civic responsibility,” elevating “society as a whole” (Nash, *Women’s Education* 16).

Republican motherhood describes women’s political place after the Revolution. This place was in the home as a dedicated and virtuous wives and mothers. The rationale behind the shift from independent woman, capable of running businesses and farms in a man’s stead to republican mother is thought to spring from the idea that “within families, the crucial role [in the family] was thought to be the mother’s: [it was the] mother who trained her children, taught them their early lessons, [and] shaped their moral choices” (Kerber 200). What is radically different from the pre-revolutionary era is that it was considered a “fourth branch of government” and “a device that ensured social control [of women] in the gentlest possible way” (200). Republican motherhood became a patriotic duty for women. They were in charge of educating future American leaders and keeping their husbands, fathers, and brothers model republican citizens. Republican motherhood “reinforced the need for improved education” with an end result that the country’s higher “interest [was] in the improvement of girls’ schooling” (Kerber 200).

However, Kerber argues that the model republican woman was a mother because her education was spared criticism; it was dedicated to the well-being of her family rather than to the promotion of her own interests (228). She states that:

the model republican woman was to be self-reliant (within limits), literate, [and] untempted by the frivolities of fashion. She had a responsibility to the political scene, though was not active in it . . . A woman’s competence was not assumed to extend to the making of political decisions. Her political task was accomplished

within the confines of her family ... The model republican woman was a mother.

(228)

I agree that Kerber and Zagari are correct in their analyses of the way in which republican motherhood limited women, I believe that republican motherhood is ultimately the catalyst for the formation of an early women's rights movement. The status quo does *not* remain intact because the ultimate result of republican motherhood is a transition into republican *womanhood*, which extends the need for education to *all* women, including those who have no desire to be wives and/or mothers. She can still be self-reliant, literate, frugal, and untempted by frivolity without being married. What makes her different than Kerber's "model" woman is that she uses education to promote her own interests rather than toward the betterment of her family.

### Women's Education in Early America

Benjamin Rush, administrator of The Young Ladies Academy of Philadelphia, was the primary advocate of education for women in the early American republic. According to Kerber, "Rush tended to link women's need for knowledge to their duty as wives and mothers," making him an advocate for republican motherhood (213). He advocated for a more "vocational" education rather than a "technical" curriculum (213).<sup>4</sup> Since "[d]omesticity was treated as a vocation, motherhood a profession," Rush taught "reading, writing, arithmetic, English grammar, composition, rhetoric, and geography" (210-11). Though these subjects may seem to comprise a "technical" education, Rush often skewed such subjects for women's duties in the home. For example, he lectured on natural philosophy to young men at the College of Philadelphia, but

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<sup>4</sup> In later chapters I reference the vocational and technical education as "ornamental" and "practical," respectively, as that is generally how scholars refer to early women's curricula.

revised the lecture for women at the Young Ladies Academy to make it more vocation. It became the “Application ... to Domestic and Culinary Purposes (213).

He had a particularly astute reason why women should dress modestly and avoid the latest fashions. He wrote, “I have sometimes been led to ascribe the invention of ridiculous and expensive fashions in female dress entirely to the gentleman in order to divert the ladies from improving their minds and thereby to secure a more arbitrary and unlimited authority over them” (qtd. in Kerber 203-04). What he means is that men create fashion trends as a covert way of keeping women submissive. If women rejected popular fashion, men would be less able to control them through arbitrary means. He also believed that the prominent ideal that “the female mind is incapable of a degree of improvement equal to that of the other sex, [is a] narrow and unphilosophical [sic] prejudice ... Learning is equally attainable, and I think equally valuable, for the satisfaction arising from it, to a woman as a man” (qtd. in Kerber 212).

Mary Beth Norton suggests that Rush’s “formula” for education “constituted a genuine step forward” for women. He did want to change the way women were perceived, but as Kerber suggests, his method was flawed when he modified male lectures to fit the vocational curriculum of domesticity (268). “[A] few men and a larger number of women were convinced that domestic excellence alone was not an adequate goal for females; women should be able to participate in all areas of study; and that, above all else, like their male counterparts, women students should learn how to reason” (269). Indeed, post-Revolutionary America was influenced by Enlightenment thought. They were beginning to understand that reason was available to both genders.

The major problems advocates for women’s education had to confront were “the traditional argument[s] that excessive learning would ‘unsex’ women” (*Liberty’s Daughters*

263). For example, Reverend James Fordyce believed that “women [should] concentrate on ‘refined’ rather than ‘profound’ subjects, and that they avoid studies irrelevant to the ‘milder modes of life” because “[a]n improper education ... could threaten woman’s sexual identity itself” (Norton, *Liberty’s Daughters* 264). If educational reformers were to advocate for women to have equal access to education, they needed to circumvent this popular sentiment. “They fervently believed that the United States had to improve the academic training available to its female citizens” because “the survival of the republic required it” (265). Norton writes that education reformers created three different yet intertwined, arguments in support of women’s education:

The first insisted that education would not “unsex” women but would instead make them better wives, mothers, and mistresses of households. The second stressed that the “feminine” nature of the instruction proposed for girls by carefully delineating the curriculum and emphasizing the cultivation of proper behavior ... the third, which was based upon the novel circumstances of the republic, turned the requirements of republican citizenship into a justification for changing educational goals. (265)

Norton goes on to say that in the hands of different people, these arguments meant different things. For Benjamin Rush, it means a “strictly utilitarian course of study,” but in the hands of author, Judith Sargent Murray, it meant “a sharp break with the past and an attempt to give women an education truly comparable to men’s” (265). Norton’s differentiation between two of the reformers of women’s education shows the difference between republican motherhood and republican womanhood. Strictly speaking, Rush’s utilitarian method of education emphasizes

republican motherhood's ideals in that education should strictly be used for the advancement of a woman's family. Murray, however, advocates education for education's sake.<sup>5</sup> For Murray, one did not have to be a mother to want to receive an education – nor should she have to aspire to be one in order to receive it. Republican womanhood, then, applies to all women, regardless of their desire to become wives and mothers. In a sense, all women had the potential to be republican women, but not all women wished to be republican mothers.

Murray also “placed great stress upon rational thinking as the chief aim of female education” (271). Girls were just as capable of rational thought as boys, according to Murray, so she advocated that girls learn how to reason, investigate, and otherwise learn how to use arguments in the same manner as men (271). In fact, Murray's ideal woman was “sensible and informed ... possessing also a facility of temper, and united to a congenial mind – blest with competency” (qtd. in Norton 271). Murray was influenced by the Enlightenment principles of Condorcet, who suggests that women are indeed smarter than many of the world's least intelligent men, which, in its own right, is not much of a compliment.<sup>6</sup>

### Alternative Solutions to Traditional Education

Despite the push for women to attend some kind of school in service to their country, many women did not have such an opportunity. However, this does not mean that they were ill-

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<sup>5</sup> Derived from the nineteenth century phrase, “art for art's sake,” which suggests that art needs no purpose. The *Oxford English Dictionary* describes the term as a “slogan [used] by artists drawing a distinction between themselves and artists of previous generations whose work, directed by patrons, often had utilitarian, religious, or didactic ends.” Education for education's sake can then be considered a way for women to become educated without having to serve a didactic purpose, such as using their education to further the agenda of the early American republic.

<sup>6</sup> See Condorcet's essay “Sur l'admission des Femmes au Droit de Cité.” For the purposes of this project, I am using Kerber's translation of various passages as it is the most readily available for my language needs.

educated. Alternative methods of education existed in the early Republic, allowing women to enjoy the fruits of education within the scope of their closely monitored domestic duties. This section examines methods of alternative education and suggests that women flourished within their own communities.

During the Revolution, women stepped outside their prescribed duties to help with the war effort. However, many women also used their domestic skills to help alleviate the need for goods and supplies for the troops. Spinning groups became popular during this time, where women congregated and produced homespun materials after the patriots called for women to stop buying luxury items. Norton suggests that “formal spinning groups had a value more symbolic than real” (168). Though she refers to the idea that spinning bees “were intended to convince American women that they could render essential contributions to the struggle against Britain,” the symbolic value of spinning bees lay in women’s ability to gather together in the pursuit of a particular purpose (168). They become a united front in the domestic sphere against Britain, proving many Revolutionary leaders’ opinions that women were a viable and important tool against fighting the British.

Reading circles were another method of alternative education for women. According to Margaret Nash, “[w]omen in the early Republic pursued learning with great ardor, whether or not formal education was available. Hundreds of women organized reading circles and literary societies in which they read and discussed everything from theology to history to astronomy” (*Women’s Education* 29). Beginning as early as the 1760s,<sup>7</sup> reading circles offered women

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<sup>7</sup> An example of reading circles from the 1760’s most used by scholars is that of Hannah Adams, an enthusiastic member of a reading circle in Medfield, Massachusetts. See *A Memoir of Miss Hannah Adams, Written by Herself with Additional Notices by a Friend* (Boston: Gray and Bowen, 1832). On her writing and reading habits, see Mary Kelley, “The Need of Their Genius: Women’s Reading and Writing Practices in Early America,” *Journal*

“claims on behalf on intellectual equality and educational opportunity as they schooled themselves in habits of reading and critical thought, writing and cultural production” (Kelley, “A More Glorious” 165). Mary Kelley presumes that these reading circles helped women “apprentice themselves for careers as makers of public opinion” (“A More Glorious” 165). In giving women opportunities to gather and share their opinions, they give themselves the space to create an intellectual community and thrive in a supportive environment.

The Boston Gleaning Circle, the “first female literary society established in post-Revolutionary America,” met for two hours each Saturday to discuss subjects ranging from theology and history, to astronomy and travel literature, generating questions and “applying their newly acquired knowledge to many of the most contested social and political issues of their day” (167).<sup>8</sup> They “allied” themselves with those in the movement to reform the way women were educated and how they were received in the political sector (169). Many did not wish to consign themselves to “mundane tasks of domesticity,” instead gearing themselves to be “useful citizens, capable of engaging in the debates animating their nation’s civic discourse” (169-70). Reading circles inherently allowed women to “remap a geography of gender based on a narrowly defined [definition] of domesticity” (170). Nash expands on the work of Mary Kelley, stating that education was thought to “lead women to God,” or at the very least, “prevent dissipation, vice, and despondency” in women (*Women’s Education* 29). I extend Nash’s ideas to include alternative methods of education, including those in reading circles and literary societies.

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*of the Early Republic* 28.1 (2008), 4-7; Kelley “A More Glorious Revolution: Women’s Antebellum Reading Circles and the Pursuit of Public Influence,” 166; and Chambers-Schiller 44, 72, 77, 78, 125, 129-30, 134-35.

<sup>8</sup> Though first established in 1805, seven years after the publication of *Reuben and Rachel*, the Boston Gleaning Circle demonstrates the fundamental principles of what most reading circles sought to accomplish, making it a representative example of the group and proof of concepts. For more information on their session to session activities, see Kelley, “The Need of Their Genius: Women’s Reading and Writing Practices in Early America,” as it examines the Boston Gleaning Circle almost exclusively.

At spinning bees and in reading circles, women gathered and contributed knowledge in order for the group dynamic to be successful. Gathering in these kinds of environments provided them with a community of peers who were invested in helping each other learn, become better writers, and better women who were able to participate in political discussions and civics.

Virginia Lee Chambers-Schiller sums up the importance of female communities as follows:

The making of a female 'self,' the growth of female autonomy, and the kindling of female ambition occurred within this separate world. Female institutions, whether formal academies and associations or informal reading circles, fostered female achievement. Female friendships provided emotional and logistical support for vocational lives. Female kin played a crucial role, for it was in the family that women formed their gender identity and established their primary relationships. The strength of these relationships enabled a small group of women to assert themselves in personally, socially, and culturally significant ways. (127)

Though ousted from the political realm after the American Revolution, women found a way to empower themselves through the seemingly innocuous method of female communities. In the privacy of the home, women could "go against the grain," so to speak, and establish a voice rendered less important during the early years of nation building. It gave them the confidence to speak passionately and eloquently on topics they cared about, as evidenced in the way the Boston Gleaning Circle established women in political thought.

As this study proves, reading conduct fiction was another method of alternative education. Murray, Foster, and Rowson wanted their readers to have the best education possible, regardless of their ability to attend a formal school. To do this, they infused their fiction with

didactic messages, allowing readers to practice reading and critical thinking skills while enjoying novels.

### Mary Wollstonecraft's Influence on American Women's Rights Discourse

Murray, Foster, and Rowson's particularly radical portrayal of women was influenced by the same source. Mary Wollstonecraft, known for her uncompromising ideals in her 1790s manifesto, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, wrote that "to deny education to women was tantamount to denying their personhood, even their divine soul, as well as participation in the natural and the civil rights of mankind" (Mellor 8). Wollstonecraft insists that education is a fundamental human right for both men and women. To deny women an education denies them a piece of their own humanity. According to Wollstonecraft, "Women's rights were thus irrevocable and undeniable" (Zagarri, *Revolutionary Backlash* 40). Wollstonecraft's ideas permeate the prose of the authors in this study, and impacted early American women's education/rights discourse. Though I do not rely heavily on the idea that the authors in question form a coalition for women's rights, I do suggest that their writing opens the door to new personal and political thoughts for women, having been influenced by Wollstonecraft's first wave feminism.

According to Ann Mellor, the major problem with society is that the Enlightenment "establish[es] bodies of men who must necessarily be made foolish or vicious by the very constitution of their profession" (Mellor 35). More specifically, the Enlightenment influenced men and government in such a way that made them political lackeys or worse, vicious defenders of their political parties. In short, Wollstonecraft believed the Enlightenment had a negative

impact on women because it created political men who sought to further their own agendas. This formulation is a bit problematic for Zaggarri because Wollstonecraft does not “emphasize the question of women’s political rights” (Zaggarri, *Revolutionary Backlash* 40). Attacking the political agendas of men does little more than suggest her discontent. Despite her dedication to exposing the inequality in educational practices, she does not address how and/or why women need to make a public entrance into politics, which could very well help her cause.

Murray uses these same enlightenment principles to her advantage. Murray deploys logic and reason to develop sound arguments in favor of women’s education. “On the Equality of the Sexes” is a good example because of the way she logically and reasonably explains that education will not impact domestic duties in any way and indeed, even prevents idleness and vice. She says, “A mind, thus filled, would have little room for the trifles with which our sex are, with too much justice, accused of amusing themselves, and they would thus be rendered fit companions for those, who should one day wear them as their crown” (7). What differentiates her argument from Wollstonecraft’s is her approach. Murray does not attack the status quo nor does she attack the character of men. She asks important questions and creates logical answers with hopes of swaying popular opinion. This approach creates an environment that fosters the opinion that women are, indeed, rational beings. They are capable to re-enter the political sphere that they were asked to enter during the revolution and then asked again to leave afterward.

Wollstonecraft’s omission of politics in her treatise does not make her any less dedicated or aggressive in her approach, though. She writes:

Men, in general, seem to employ their reason to justify prejudices, which they have imbibed, they can scarcely trace how, rather than to root them out. The mind

must be strong that resolutely forms its own principles; for a kind of intellectual cowardice prevails which makes many men shrink from the task, or only do it by halves. Yet the imperfect conclusions thus drawn, are frequently very plausible, because they are built on partial experience, on just, though narrow views.

(Wollstonecraft 28)

This language is confrontational in nature. Though men seem to use reason and logic to justify their prejudicial nature, such measures only expose them as weak minded and cowardly. If they were to follow such a rational thought all the way to the end, they might find a different answer. However, their own narrow views taint whatever reason and logic they employ and allow them to “shrink from the task” of following reason through its natural course. Sheila Skemp explains that some Americans who read Wollstonecraft thought her language “a bit strident” and her “tendency to blame men for the woes of women a little unfair” (303). However, many were able to ignore these ideas and focus on “those insights with which they agreed” (303). Though such an aggressive writing style alienated some of her readers and started a debate about “the dangers of feminism,” Wollstonecraft was ultimately able to present a “common sense,” no nonsense argument for women’s rights that greatly influenced Murray, Foster, and Rowson (303).

Wollstonecraft shows that women’s education is an issue that was of great importance to female authors writing in the early 1790s. By the late 1790s, women’s voices and opinions grew stronger as they wrote about the relationships between women and men, women and the government, and women’s roles in education. Hannah Webster Foster and Susanna Rowson expand on the work of Judith Sargent Murray and Mary Wollstonecraft, creating politically charged manuscripts meant to disseminate their opinions and teach women that education is

available in many different forms. Even if they did not have access to a preceptress and a boarding school, they could still learn many of life's vital lessons through reading their books and participating in their communities.

### Conclusion

Overall, women's political place in post-Revolutionary America evolved from Enlightenment philosophy's emphasis on a *human's* ability to reason. Locke's *First Treatise on Government* gave women an entrance into the public sphere and the ability to participate in civic culture. However, since women had no means of expressing their own political will in the early nation, their entrance into the public is virtually useless. Expressing their opinions to men only becomes important when men listen and take their opinions seriously, which often proves to be a hardship in the early Republic. Though important, I believe that Locke's ideas only reinforced that women are capable of independent thought but are limited in their outlet of such thoughts.

Max Sevelle writes that "[t]he United States Revolution was one of the national manifestations of the Enlightenment" that was a phenomenon of "great alteration in the religious, moral, political, and social character of the people" (395).<sup>9</sup> He argues that, as a whole, the Enlightenment "must be seen as a revolutionary change in the life style of the civilization of the western world" (396).<sup>10</sup> Between 1775 and 1780, the states had written constitutions that were

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<sup>9</sup> Derived from John Adams, *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States*. Ed. Charles Francis Adams. Boston, 1850. 282.

<sup>10</sup> Sevelle makes it clear that the manifestations of the Enlightenment varied between societies and that it was wrought with upheaval because even "the men of the Enlightenment differed deeply and bitterly among themselves" (396).

“richly permeated with Enlightenment political ideals” (400).<sup>11</sup> After the Revolution, the Enlightenment continued to influence policy makers and stir the self-consciousness of common citizens, making room for early ideas on nationalism and women’s rights. Though the Enlightenment sought to redefine the way citizens interacted with politics, seeking to end dependence and passivity, women were often excluded, taking a less visible role in nation building.<sup>12</sup> Many traditional feminine qualities had a primarily negative connotation. Kerber defines these feminine qualities as those of luxury, effeminacy (including timidity and dependence), and vice.<sup>13</sup> “If Americans lived in a world of the political imagination in which virtue was ever threatened by corruption, it must be added that the overtones of virtue were male, and those of corruption, female” (31). Up until the American Revolution, women had little to say about their place in society, and as Kerber says, “would have to invent their own ideology” if they were to “count themselves as the daughters of Liberty” (32). However, “inventing their own ideology” came with some unexpected results. Women used the ideology of republican motherhood to jumpstart their education, with the end result of furthering their own agendas rather than the agenda of the early Republic. As a result of their education, many became disillusioned with republican motherhood and sought to define themselves as republican women.

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<sup>11</sup> The Articles of Confederation are a good example of such ideologies relying on Enlightenment principles. It gave “the former colonies an institutional basis for united action on the common problems of the war, international relations, intercolonial affairs, economic problems, and territorial administration” (Sevelle 401). Its structure rested on “the federal idea of sovereignty and natural rights of new societies that had been expounded with regard to the British Empire ... before the war” (401).

<sup>12</sup> See Fred Weinstein and Gerald M. Platt, *The Wish to Be Free: Society, Psyche and Value Change* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1969), 49.

<sup>13</sup> Kerber’s definition of feminine virtue comes from primary source letters from George Washington, James Warren, William Hillhouse, and Samuel Adams warning against “undermining public virtue” by such negative feminine qualities (31).

The following chapters will examine this phenomenon through the writings of Judith Sargent Murray, Hannah Webster Foster, and Susanna Haswell Rowson.

## **CHAPTER TWO –WOMEN’S EDUCATION AS REPRESENTED IN THE STORY OF MARGARETTA BY JUDITH SARGENT MURRAY AND THE BOARDING SCHOOL BY HANNAH WEBSTER FOSTER**

*It doth not appear that she was governed by any one sensual appetite; but merely by a desire of adorning her mind; a laudable ambition fired her soul, and a thirst for knowledge impelled the predilection so fatal in its consequences*

Judith Sargent Murray, “On the Equality of the Sexes”

In 1790, Judith Sargent Murray published her treatise on gender equality in the March-April edition of *The Massachusetts Magazine, or, Monthly Museum of Knowledge and Rational Entertainment*. “On the Equality of the Sexes” examines inequality between the genders in the early American republic – specifically the notion that women were only capable of a lifetime of service to the home. Murray’s essay, indeed, her entire body of work, examines how women’s place in society is dictated by her inequality to men. Well-versed in Enlightenment principles, Murray exposes some of the flaws in the early Republic’s cultural practices. She advocates for equality between the sexes, but ultimately understands that American society will never change overnight. Like Wollstonecraft, Murray was known for her opinions on women’s rights and penned her treatise “On the Equality of the Sexes” to prove that education is a fundamental human right, not just a right belonging to men. Together, these two authors show the relationships among Enlightenment and popular thought on education. Hannah Webster Foster, writing later in the 1790s, presents a less radical view of women’s education.

While Murray suggests in her essays that education is a human right, *The Story of Margarett* gives us a different opinion. I suggest that *Margarett* is Murray’s compromise on her radical position regarding women’s education. Foster, on the other hand, gives us a perfectly rational and reasonable view of women’s education in *The Boarding School* that ultimately

validates republican womanhood. This chapter examines each author's relationship with republican womanhood through the way each portrays women's education in their respective texts. If they have anything in common, it is the need for a more inclusive educational system for women. Murray writes conduct fiction, a hybridized genre that combines the didactic advice of conduct books and the narrative structure of fiction, to present their readers with moral lessons and the ability to think and reason for themselves on a variety of different subjects while Foster relies on the conduct book genre, presenting didactic messages in half conduct book and half epistolary form.

Murray and Foster provide us with an intricate view into how society views women, education, and all the offshoots of the combination, including how seduction, marriage, filial relationships, and friendship affect women. They provide their readers with fictional representations of republican motherhood and republican womanhood, suggesting that one is not necessarily more important than the other, effectively making education the focus of republican mothers and republican women rather than duties related to the limitations of their biological sex. Kerber does say that the "model" republican women were "rumored to exist in America," which seems to mean that her "model" republican mother is an enigma that is hard to find (207). This elusive model republican mother was "given fictional form by Murray and Charles Brockden Brown" because "[t]hose who believed in [such] republican models demanded that their presence be recognized and endorsed and that a new generation of young women be urged to find in them patterns for their own behavior" (207). In other words, Murray and Foster knew that their readers would follow by example, and so they created republican women as guides.

### Guiding America's Youth to Success through Conduct Books

Sarah Emily Newton's article, "Wise and Foolish Virgins: 'Usable Fiction' and the Early American Conduct Tradition," is most useful for defining the use of the conduct book in post-Revolutionary America. She suggests that conduct books "formulate" a "code of ethical behavior that delineates approved gender roles" and are written by anyone who has an opinion on "avowed ideals and behavior of young people" (140). They often contain formal descriptions of "appropriate behavior" based on Christian morals and are written specifically for "the inexperienced young adult" (143). The conduct book, in essence, makes the distinction between the public sphere and the private sphere (often called the woman's sphere) very clear by emphasizing the "spiritual, physical, and emotional differences" between men and women. Claire Pettengill extends Newton's discussion of the public and private spheres to conclude that novels of the early Republic "reveal the impact of these transformations [from public to private] on the American family, and more particularly, on American women who, more and more, were expected to embody domestic ideals and virtues" (185). The conduct book becomes the method for teaching women the fundamental principles of womanhood in a friendly, easy to digest collection of parables and advice.

In *A Colonial Woman's Bookshelf*, Kevin J. Hayes suggests that though conduct books of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries could "speak from the point of view of a minister, a mother, a father, or a peer," the voice must be recognized as "the voice inherent within the text itself" and as "a voice refracted through the framework of early American society" (59). Conduct books read in the revolutionary era act as portholes to the values, customs, and gender roles of a given time period. In the early Republic, such a porthole exposes the republican values that

dictated the country's attitudes toward women. As the ideology of republican motherhood gained popularity, the pressure for women to perform became more intense as focus shifted from the war effort to how women were going to teach citizens to be virtuous, dutiful, republican citizens. Hayes' argument works in tandem with Newton and Pettengill's analyses, creating a universal definition of the American conduct book that shows that the early Republic valued wisdom and virtue, so much so that conduct books became some of the most popular presents for young adults.

Though many conduct books in the new Republic were published in England, they often had great success in America. *The Lady's Pocket Library*, for example, published by Matthew Carey in 1792, is a compilation of the more popular conduct books in the United States in the late eighteenth-century and includes: *Miss More's Essays*, *Dr. Gregory's Legacy to His Daughters*, *Lady Pennington's Unfortunate Mother's Advice to Her Daughters*, *Marchioness of Lambert's Advice of a Mother to Her Daughter*, *Mrs. Chapone's Letter on the Government of the Temper*, *Swift's Letter to a Young Lady Newly Married*, and *Moore's Fables for the Female Sex*. In examining some of these conduct books, I hope to uncover the "porthole" that illuminates the fundamental characteristics of a good, republican woman and how those characteristics place pressure on women to have correct behavior all the time, essentially putting them on stage for the world to see. The pressure put on women to perform is immense; failure to meet the all the expectations of character places the entire nation at risk of devolving into lethargic and ill-mannered citizens and anarchy.

Conduct books were charged with ensuring that young women keep and maintain the prescribed gender roles given to them. The introduction to *Miss More's Essays* says, "each sex

has its respective, appropriated qualifications, which would cease to be meritorious, the instant they ceased to be appropriated,” suggesting that in order for “[n]ature, propriety, and custom” to remain in the status quo, women must remain feminine and never cease to “annihilate distinctions” between the sexes (Carey 6). In this appropriation of each sex’s abilities, the text says, “[m]en ... are formed for the more public exhibitions on the great theatre of human life” while women “clearly point out the necessity of a superior degree of caution, retirement, and reserve” because they are the weaker sex (6). *Dr. Gregory’s Legacy to His Daughters* takes a similar stance. He writes, “One of the chief beauties, in a female character, is that modest reserve, that retiring delicacy, which avoids the public eye, and is disconcerted even at the gaze of admiration” (93). These passages provide evidence of separate sphere ideology in the early nation. According to these manuals, women’s fundamental weakness as women required them to exercise more caution than men about their reputations. Women’s safest and more appropriate place was home, tending to domestic affairs while men, who were naturally made for public pursuits, should attend to the political and public aspect of life.

Conduct books also addressed women’s education. However, they differ on their opinions on this subject. For example, *Dr. Gregory’s Legacy to His Daughters* urges women to be “cautious of displaying [their] good sense” and to keep their education a “profound secret, especially from the men, who generally look with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of great parts, and a cultivated understanding” (94). *Lady Pennington’s Unfortunate Mother’s Advice to Her Daughters*, however, suggests that her daughters “[s]tudy their own language thoroughly” so that they might “speak correctly” and “write grammatically” (135). She also suggests they learn French and Italian, learn geography to “form a just idea of the situation of

places, mentioned in any author,” and to “be perfect in the first four rules of arithmetic” (135).<sup>14</sup> According to Lady Pennington, female education and improvement is, indeed, important and should not be hidden at all costs, as Dr. Gregory suggests. Rather than relegate women to the home with little access to the outside world, Lady Pennington’s advice gives her daughters the confidence needed to learn and be proficient in several subjects, which allows them to then be useful wives and pertinent companions to their husbands rather than voiceless helpmeets in a loveless relationship (136).<sup>15</sup> This difference of opinion situates the purpose of this chapter firmly in the changing thoughts of women’s education in the early America. Although many conduct books advocated for the status quo when it comes to gender roles, separate spheres, and women’s education, others show the changing attitudes of the time period, as evidenced by Lady Pennington’s sentiments.

The foundation of this project rests on the idea that didactic lessons can be found in the fiction of Murray, Foster, and Rowson as well as in conduct books, effectively paving the way for a new genre called conduct fiction. This new genre, studied only by a few scholars, includes or constitutes “hybrid” texts where “female characters are tested, judged, rewarded, or punished by conduct book standards of virtue and right behavior,” according to Sarah Emily Newton, who made the term well known (140). Rather than giving “prescriptive instructions,” conduct fiction “embeds the principles and ideals in narrative matrices that make the process of deciding to do right or wrong plausibly human and alive” (140). Newton’s point emphasizes that conduct fiction is reader-driven, which is a revolutionary shift for women because it places them at “the center

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<sup>14</sup> She does say that they will never have any need for advanced math, so their minds “should not be burdened with needless application” (135).

<sup>15</sup> It is worth noting here that Lady Pennington is separated from her husband, hence the title’s reference to an “unfortunate mother.”

of a recognizable world” where a woman’s decisions had power. By depicting women’s real life issues in novel form, conduct books empowered readers to exert agency and make educated personal decisions for themselves (143). To Newton, “the lines between conduct precept and fiction were blurred early on” and were “[w]ritten for a predominantly female audience” because plots consisted of the way “female characters [were] tested, judged, regarded, or punished by conduct book standards of virtue and right behavior” (140). Essentially, conduct fiction “embeds principles and ideals in narrative matrices that make the process of deciding to do right or wrong plausibly human and alive” (140). In creating “usable fiction,” readers of the genre become more actively engaged with the character, her plight, and the underlying social implications of her triumph or tragedy (140-41). Conduct fiction, then, is fiction with the ultimate purpose of teaching young men and women some of the proper foundational qualities of character, including conduct, deportment, proper subjects to study, what to look for in a husband or wife, and how to form lasting relationships with both sexes.

Conduct fiction is closely connected to the rise of the novel in the early United States. Bakhtin believes that the novel is both “critical and self-critical,” suggesting that it has the distinct ability to examine the social or political mores of a particular culture as well as the ability to criticize genre as a whole (10). In this study, Murray, Foster, and Rowson most certainly use their novels to be critical of the world around them. By using the sentimental genre, often considered British in nature because of its close association to Samuel Richardson, created a foundation for the American novel. Murray, Foster, and Rowson show that the novel, and more specifically the sentimental novel, can do more for its readers than entertain. Their books are also meant to educate, showing that their novels are not only critical of the world around them, but

also of other novels of the time period. Rather than just tell a simple story about simple characters, the authors in this study choose to infuse their work with cultural commentary that allows their readers the opportunity to read and make conclusions for themselves. This, I believe, is the foundation for conduct fiction and the way I interpret the texts in question.

### Republican Mothers to Republican Women: Judith Sargent Murray and the Great Compromise

Judith Sargent Murray, one of the great women writers of the late eighteenth century, questions the social and cultural practices of early America. Her most commented on subject is republican motherhood. She suggests that womanhood is more multi-faceted than just the idea that motherhood is the ultimate goal for women. We can see the transformation of republican motherhood to republican womanhood in her essays and fiction. Murray is particularly engaged with how women are perceived and treated by the early Republic and how republican motherhood both limited and expanded women's opportunities outside the home (Harris xxvii). Kerber suggests that

[t]he idea that political independence should be the catalyst for a new female self-reliance that would free women from the constraints of the marriage market and prepare them to be economically independent appears in its most developed form in the work of Judith Sargent Murray. (204)

This passage helps show the relationship between the limitations and expansions that republican motherhood brought to the female population of early America. On one hand, this ideology brought about self-reliance, educated thoughts, a degree of independence, and a "strong political

identification with the Republic” (Harris xxvii). On the other hand, republican motherhood was also “a means of denying women direct political participation in the new republic” (xxvii). Furthermore, this ideal created several “gender biases” including the ideas that “women are politically inept” and “women have political power through the domestic arena in that they can influence their husbands and sons” (xxvii). Murray sought to increase “educational opportunities for women” and also increase “employment opportunities outside the home,” a more complex set of ideas that showed her “advocacy of republican motherhood’s major tenets,” as Harris suggests (xxvii). Murray’s writing advocates for republican womanhood – increasing educational and employment opportunities outside the home, as Harris suggests above. Though she acknowledges those women who become educated to teach their families in a favorable light, she ultimately aligns herself with women who wish to improve their minds for their own desires and not for the improvement of anyone but themselves. This concept is most demonstrated in her essay, “On the Equality of the Sexes,” which asks if “the needle and kitchen [is] sufficient to employ the operations” of an organized woman (5)? She contends that education will not impede domestic duties, as they are duties that can be done mindlessly and without significant thought (7). Women must also be “constantly upon [their] guard,” making “prudence and discretion” priority qualities of character in order to “obtain a complete victory over those who have been long adding to the native strength of their minds, by an unremitted study of men and books, and who have, moreover, conceived from the loose characters which they have seen portrayed in the extensive variety of their reading, a most contemptible opinion of the sex” (9-10). Here, she specifically warns women to guard themselves against naysayers of women’s education by only exhibiting themselves as prudent beings in order to fight against the preconceived notion that

women who read fiction are prone to exhibit the same characteristics as the “loose characters” they read.

Murray answers this question in her revision of the Adam and Eve story from Genesis. The story tells us that Adam and Eve lived in a state of harmony in the Garden of Eden until Eve was approached by a serpent, who asked her to defy God’s one law: do not eat the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. Catholics and Protestants used this story to villainize women for their seduction and disobedience. Murray suggests that Eve was “seduced from obedience by a malignant demon” who offers her attainment of “a perfection of knowledge,” thus offering her all the knowledge denied to her by Adam (12). Eve eats the fruit, convinces Adam to do the same, and both are banished from the Garden of Eden. Eve bears the brunt of God’s wrath and exposes all women to pain during childbirth and the guilt of Original Sin. However, rather than believe Eve, and thus all women, are easily seduced, Murray contends that Eve was only “governed ... by a desire of adorning her mind” rather than out of any kind of sensual appetite (12). She was driven by “ambition ... and a thirst for knowledge” that “impelled the predilection so fatal in its consequences” (12). To Murray, women are not inherently evil because Eve was seduced by the snake. In fact, Eve is not evil at all. She simply craved knowledge that would truly make her Adam’s equal. Her actions, then, are justifiable.

Adam’s actions, however, are not. He, not gifted with the knowledge that Eve received from the serpent, had no justifiable reason to bite from the forbidden fruit. Murray wonders what “could be his inducement to burst the barriers, and to fly directly in the face” of God’s command (12)? She suggests that we “blush when ye remember, that he was influenced by no other motive than a bare pusillanimous attachment to a woman,” making Adam the intellectual inferior to Eve

because he acts on lust over knowledge. Men, then, use their own intellectual inferiority against women by labeling them as sinful and “the emblem of weakness” (14). In such a male dominated society, all the blame is placed on Eve’s indiscretion and the “wiles” she must have used to persuade Adam. Murray really exposes the first double standard: Adam is guilty of a worse sin because he ate the forbidden fruit lusting after a woman and goes unpunished. Eve, on the other hand, craves knowledge and equality, and forever brands her sex as sinful. This double standard also explains why Murray suggests that women be on guard against those who believe reading corrupts women. Women and knowledge have been tainted in the eyes of men, who are quick to assume that reading influences women in a negative manner. After all, would Eve have sinned if she had not been craving knowledge? Knowledge and the subsequent actions of women are forever linked and Murray seeks to expose the logical flaws in this argument.

*The Story of Margareta* seems to be Murray’s response to many of the different ideological concerns surrounding women’s education. The first issue she addresses is how educated a woman should be. Mr. Vigilius expresses his concern over Margareta’s education as he explains his wife’s role in the process:

Mary very soon sketched out for our charge rather an extensive plan of education; and as I was not entirely convinced of the inutility of her views, the natural indolence of my temper induced me to let the matter pass, without entering my caveat by way of stopping proceedings; and indeed, I think the propriety of circumscribing the education of a female, within such narrow bounds as are frequently assigned, is at least problematical. (Murray 163)

Here, we can see Mr. Vigillius' initial concern with an "extensive" education for his adopted daughter. However, his trust in his wife coupled with his ability to reason keeps him from interfering in Margaretta's education. He believes that "the matron is entrusted not only the care of her daughter, but also the forming the first and oftentimes the most important movements of that mind" (163).

Though he may be initially reserved about giving Margaretta an education involving "[f]ine writing, arithmetic, geography, astronomy, music, [and] drawing," Mr. Vigillius represents some of the positive Enlightenment principles outlined in Chapter One of this thesis, including Locke's opinion that women deserve the right to govern the household without their husbands' interference and Condorcet's decidedly liberal point of view regarding the mental capacity of women. Mary Vigillius not only takes complete control of the education of her daughter, but she demonstrates that she has the superior mental ability to do so. Though inferior to men in brute strength, as expressed by Condorcet, she demonstrates a decidedly exceptional dedication to Margaretta's education, uncovering Murray's opinion that the gap between gendered intellects is really quite small. Mr. Vigillius' lack of involvement in Margaretta's education only proves this idea. Margaretta grows up with a "judiciously balanced" mind, rendering her "amiable, and more generally useful" without his input. In fact, he expresses his skepticism about the matter by acting surprised at how accomplished his daughter is by the time she turns 16. He says:

But whatever may be the merits of the course which I am thus *apparently* advocating, without stopping to examine the other side of the question, I proceed to say, that the plan of education adopted for Margaretta was, as I have already

hinted, sufficiently extensive ... I must in justice declare, that the consequence, by producing Margareta at the age of sixteen, a beautiful and accomplished girl.  
(author's emphasis 164).

What is interesting about this passage is Murray's emphasis on the word "apparently." It shows Mr. Vigillius' skepticism about women's education, especially toward the end of the passage when he must, in the interest of justice and remaining fair to his wife, declare that no harm has come to Margareta's femininity or sense of domesticity while learning subjects that might otherwise remove her from the domestic arena (164-65).

Murray's essay, "Observations on Female Abilities" addresses this idea as well. She declares that "we [advocates for women's education] are not desirous to array the Sex in marital habiliments; we do not wish to enlist our women as soldiers; and we request it may be remembered, that we only contend for the *capability* of the female mind to become possessed of any attainment" (36). Murray understands that, realistically, women need to remain women. She does not attempt to redefine gender roles or suggest that women do not belong in the home. What she does advocate for is a more inclusive society that realizes the intellectual merits of its women. Mr. Vigillius, though skeptical, still allows Margareta's education to be as extensive as Mary Vigillius wishes it to be. This section of the story proves a few different ideas: the first is that Murray believes women do not have to give up their femininity or their domesticity to become educated. The second is that Mr. Vigillius represents the conflicted nature of men in the female education process.

If we return back to Benjamin Rush, his decidedly vocational method of educating women at the Young Ladies Academy of Philadelphia shows the merits and the pitfalls of such a

conflicted nature. Rush does wish to see women become educated, but only to “fulfill their supportive roles in the new American society” (Jacoba 147). Rather than force Mary to teach a vocational curriculum, Mr. Vigillius steps aside and uses reason, a common tenet of Enlightenment principles, to deduce that Mary’s role as republican mother fully prepares her for the challenges of teaching a liberal education to Margareta. Madelon Jacoba suggests that Murray and *The Story of Margareta* “advocates the politicization of women through education,” specifically through an Enlightenment education that “balanc[es] reason and sentiment,” and will give women in the new republic “a brighter future” (146). However, Jacoba also believes that “Murray’s vision of feminist reform, that begins with education and with the family, radically challenged dominant ideas of the time and paved the way for a new social-political role for women” (147).

Thus, we can deduce that Murray herself is conflicted in her own opinions regarding women’s education. On one hand, she definitely wants women to be equal to men. This is evident in her essays, “On Equality of the Sexes” and “Observations on Female Abilities.” On the other hand, she understands that society will never make such a radical leap forward, so she presents a compromise in *The Story of Margareta*: educating women liberally is permissible as long as it does not interfere with their duties as women and domestics. From this, we can see that Murray’s essays advocate women to be republican women and her novella straddles the line between status quo and full-on ideological battle by showing women that republican motherhood can, indeed, be used to one’s advantage.

I classify *The Story of Margareta* as conduct fiction because of the way the text treats seduction. Though seduction and early America’s fear of it is examined more closely in the next

chapter, I examine it here because of the distinct way Murray uses education and reason to combat seduction in the text. Once Margaretta leaves the safety of her parents' home she meets a charming man who is instantly smitten with her. Youth and innocence keep her from seeing his true nature, despite the repeated warnings by her parents, and she falls hopelessly in love with him. What is most interesting to note about their whirlwind interest for one another is that it is contested by Mr. and Mrs. Vigillius. They believe that "should [they] refuse, to this pretender [Courtland], that uniform civility, with which we have distinguished every stranger, the wound thereby given to the feelings of Margaretta, might very possibly add to the strength of her attachment" (Murray 181). Instead of blindly forbidding Margaretta from seeing Courtland, they use deductive reasoning to conclude that forbidding her will only serve to heighten her emotional connection to him, causing her further pain down the road when she does find out about his sinister motives. Murray gives Mr. and Mrs. Vigillius what many authors of seduction literature do not give their parental figures: common sense, suggesting that with a little reason, a little sense, and a little patience, parents in the new nation can play an active role in their children's lives without causing irreparable harm when they fall in love with suitors who might not fit in with their plan.

In Margaretta's case, her parents have every hope for her eventual marriage to a childhood friend yet do not let this plan factor into the way they handle her love of Courtland. Because they only want what's best for Margaretta, they leave things be, giving her all the love, support, and parental advice that she needs to make an educated decision about her unworthy suitor. Mrs. Vigillius, in particular, is paramount to Margaretta's success. She gives her sage advice, such as:

Ask yourself, my dear, what opportunity have you had of becoming acquainted with the views, habits, or temper of Mr. Courtland; and yet, although, when your letter was written, only *ten days* from the moment of your introduction to him had elapsed, you *seriously pronounced him the individual, who of all his sex was the most capable of making you happy!* Such is the natural good sense of my Margaretta, that I assure myself I need not comment upon this declaration. (author's emphasis 178).

Here, Mrs. Vigillius deftly alerts Margaretta to her lapse in judgment, suggesting that ten days is too little time to know the character of a man enough love him. Mrs. Vigillius uses reason in her advice to Margaretta on more than one occasion. Later in the text, she says:

Will you, my sweet girl ... *re-consider* this affirmation [of love]? You are fond of reasoning, you know; and trust me, my dear, when I assure you, that an attachment which embraceth not reason is auxillary, is not worth cherishing ... Say, my charming reasoner, would these over-nice distinctions, for which you cannot find a name, ever have found entrance into the bosom of a virtuous girl, were it not for the false taste which is formed by novel reading? (author's emphasis 184).

This particular passage is intriguing for a few reasons. The first is because it reaffirms Murray's position as an Enlightenment thinker who uses the philosophy to advocate for women's rights. In this case, she uses Mrs. Vigillius to teach and guide Margaretta toward the right path, a true representation of the republican mother that was addressed in Chapter One of this thesis. The second is that Murray addresses the negative impact of novel reading on young, impressionable

minds. Though I do not believe she thought fiction was the only reason for Margareta's transgressions, she does expose the need for an education based on reason and the Enlightenment in addition to novel reading. In this instance, Murray is advocating for compromise, again.

But, can the novella be considered conduct fiction if Murray attacks the novel in favor of a balance between reading and education? If we look at the above passage by itself, it would seem that the answer is no. However, if we look at the text as a whole, especially the interaction between Mrs. Vigillius and Margareta, we can come to a different conclusion. It is Mrs. Vigillius who allows Margareta to read novels as a part of her education, seeing no issue with the practice as long as they supervise her reading habits and are prepared to talk to her about them when she's finished (165). So, it seems that Mrs. Vigillius is using this moment as a method of persuasion; it is a method that allows Margareta to think reasonably for herself during a moment where she trusts her unwieldy emotions too much. Though the exchange does not quash her feelings for Courtland, it does expose her devotion to filial duty, which trumps any love she may feel for Courtland. She asks if it is possible to "unite [her] hopes and wishes with the expectations of those who have a right to [her] utmost obedience," which shows that she has already decided to please her adoptive parents rather than follow her heart (187). Though it pains her, it is ultimately the correct decision, as Margareta soon learns that Courtland's past is as licentious as she has heard. Though Margareta's road to emotional enlightenment is troubled, she ultimately learns a great lesson: reason and logic will always guide her to success, an idea that Murray is trying to emphasize as well. As long as young women are able to balance themselves with an education that teaches them how to use logic and reason, their emotions should never be taken advantage of. This idea makes *The Story of Margareta* conduct fiction

because her readers learn the value of reason and logic in the education of women, hopefully bringing those principles into their own lives.

Validating Republican Womanhood in Hannah Webster Foster's *The Boarding School*

*The Boarding School* (1798), published several years after *The Story of Margaretta* reveals a fundamental difference between the ways each author viewed women's education. Foster advocates a curriculum that allows women the opportunity to learn such subjects as reading, writing, arithmetic, music, dancing, the government of temper and manners, dress, politeness, amusements, filial and fraternal affection, friendship, love, and religion. This list strikes an uneven balance between ornamental subjects (dancing, manners, etc.) exclusive to female learning and the pragmatic subjects of reading, writing, and arithmetic. The curriculum portrayed in Murray's work includes reading, English grammar, writing, history, arithmetic, reason, and geography. This comparison demonstrates on a superficial level that although Foster and Murray both advocated women's education, they had contesting viewpoints on what constituted a proper curriculum for women.

Foster, for instance, places great emphasis on the ornamental subjects of the time period, suggesting that women reading *The Boarding School* should take lessons from its pages regarding proper letter writing etiquette, how to foster relationships with other women, as well as the other ornamental subjects outlined above as a means of refining their femininity and ability to function within the tenets of republican womanhood. Murray takes a slightly different stance, still using ornamental subjects in her curriculum but making them elective, suggesting that the traditionally more masculine subjects of history, geography, reason, etc. is better served to

provide a type of education to women that puts them on a more equal plane as their male counterparts. According to Gwendolyn Foster Hannah Webster Foster “creates a fluid state in which she seemingly supports the standards of female virtue while simultaneously calling these standards into question” (59). Foster, whose emphasis on ornamental subjects seemingly supports domesticity, femininity, and womanhood, ultimately calls the standards of domesticity, femininity, and virtue into question by suggesting that women need a certain kind of curriculum in order to make them domestic, feminine, and virtuous. Hannah Webster Foster not only questions the standards of domesticity, but also questions republican motherhood.

Addressed to “the young ladies of America,” the dedication page to *The Boarding School* shows us Foster’s opinion regarding the necessity of women’s education:

Convinced of the many advantages of a good education, and the importance of improving those advantages; or of counterbalancing the want of them by exerting the mental powers which nature has bestowed; sensible, too, that the foundation of a useful and happy life must be laid in youth, and that much depends on the early infusion of virtuous principles into the docile mind, the author has employed a part of her leisure hours in collecting and arranging her ideas on the subject of female deportment. (4)

Foster, “convinced” of the necessity of women’s education, wants other women to recognize its importance as well. In order to reach women, she penned *The Boarding School* as a conduct book to teach them what a proper education for women might look like at a boarding school. However, I believe Foster is not necessarily advocating for women to attend a traditional boarding school but to read her book, employ a similar schedule to those attending Harmony

Grove, and educate themselves. In this manner, Foster is making her message accessible to all, suggesting that her readers become accountable for their own education and lives. In this manner, they can still retain their femininity, continue to be domestic, and give themselves an education that would benefit their future families as well as the republic.

I argue that volume one of this text has more in common with a conduct book than conduct fiction, which is important because it ultimately shows Foster's position as a more traditional woman than Murray, yet it can still be categorized as conduct fiction because of the epistolary format of the second volume.<sup>16</sup> We see in the passage above that Foster uses *The Boarding School* to "arrange her ideas on the subject of female deportment" (4). The text makes little pretense as to its purpose. Since the dedication does not refer to the text as a work of fiction in any way, shape, or form, yet does expose its purpose as a book on female deportment, we can come to no other conclusion than its intended purpose as a conduct book. The structure of the text supports this opinion. The first volume is separated into a schedule that dictates what the women are learning during any given moment of the day. "Monday, P.M." is devoted to reading, "Tuesday, A.M." to writing and arithmetic, etc. The second volume is crafted as a series of epistles from each student at Mrs. Williams' school to each other, dictating their experiences outside of the confines of Harmony Grove and away from the teachings of their moral preceptress, ultimately categorizing it as conduct fiction because of the fictional nature of the second volume.

Scholars have noted that *The Boarding School* "can only be read as a series of thinly disguised lectures on female education and deportment that repeat the accepted wisdom of 18<sup>th</sup>-

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<sup>16</sup> Though much is not known about Hannah Foster, we do know she never was a playwright like Murray, giving her a more genteel appearance to readers.

century America” (Ginsberg 66). What can be deduced is that *The Boarding School* has more in common with a conduct book than as a work of conduct fiction. Foster does not write a story that contains developed characters or a story arc but rather didactic fables and epistles that are meant to teach rather than entertain. Claire Pettengill believes *The Boarding School* to be “overwhelmingly didactic” and “less complex” than Foster’s earlier work, *The Coquette* (187). She argues that the text is “portable pedagogy” that “set[s] forth unquestioned moral precepts in the thinnest fictional veil” (187).

While the epistolary novel is defined as a story told through a series of letters, the second part of *The Boarding School* does not have any discernable plot line that would indicate it to be a “novel.” The characters Harriot Henly, Laura Guilford, Julia Greenfield, Caroline Littleton, Cleora Partridge, and Matilda Fielding are the vehicles that allow Foster to place the lessons found in the first part of the text into practice. Foster gives her readers the opportunity to read along with a group of women as they attempt to live their lives according to the lessons taught to them by Mrs. Williams. Harriot Henly, for example, writes to Mrs. Williams at the first opportunity, “conformably to [her] promise” (Foster 114). True to Mrs. Williams’ teachings, Harriot does not participate in the “haunts of intemperance and excess” but instead rises early and reads as she waits for her family to wake. Harriot’s family participates in a kind of idleness that she is incapable of participating in as she is “long accustomed to early rising” from her days at the boarding school. It is clear that Harriot is unprepared for the excesses of city living when she returns from Harmony-Grove. This idea essentially carries over to all of Foster’s characters in the second part of the text. Each woman is presented with a problem that places her in a space between defying the lessons learned in the first part of the text and defying the teachings of their

preceptress. When faced with defying Mrs. Williams, the “perfect republican mother,” according to Pettengill, the girls always choose to adhere to her teachings, ultimately showing readers of *The Boarding School* that the foundation of a good education, a good woman, and a good citizen in the republican woman (189).<sup>17</sup> Essentially, Mrs. Williams teaches her pupils “how to function in a separate sphere,” because Mrs. Williams, herself, is in her appropriate sphere, which ultimately shows Foster as the advocate for republican womanhood rather than a subversive author teaching women the fundamentals of independence (189-90).

I do not believe *The Boarding School* can be categorized as conduct fiction, yet I chose this chapter to analyze it because of the conversation it elicits between Murray and Foster. Murray, as shown in the previous section, seeks compromise between her women’s rights treatise essays and the practicality of educating women, creating *The Story of Margareta* as the compromise between the two concepts. Foster, in contrast, does not seek to flout authority, but suggests that women’s education should affirm those concepts present in conduct books. In showcasing didactic lessons and the epistles that show these lessons in action, Foster ultimately concludes that republican womanhood is the most important aspect of citizenship in the early Republic, using her text as a means of preserving femininity, domesticity, and the status quo.

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<sup>17</sup> Pettengill also suggests that since paternal authority has “declined in the most concrete way, with the death of her minister husband,” Mrs. Williams is free educate and “instill the appropriate virtues in those under her care” (189).

### CHAPTER THREE – FEMALE COMMUNITIES AND THE FIGHT FOR AUTONOMY IN HANNAH WEBSTER FOSTER’S *THE COQUETTE* AND SUSANNA ROWSON’S *CHARLOTTE TEMPLE*

Let me then enjoy the 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.

Hannah Webster Foster, *The Coquette*

These words, uttered by Eliza Wharton, represent a bid for autonomy<sup>18</sup> in the early Republic. Unfettered by societal constraints, Eliza exhibits a *joie de vivre* that ultimately alienates her from her more straight-laced, proper friends who exhibit many of the characteristics of the republican woman. *The Coquette* (1797), Hannah Webster Foster’s interpretation of the Elizabeth Whitman scandal, addresses autonomy and the need for sisterhood in a close-knit community of women. Written in response to Susanna Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple* (1791), Foster comments on early America’s growing conflict with parental authority as well as its need to delegate women back into the home to lead republican lives. More importantly though, *The Coquette* demonstrates how republican womanhood and sisterhood fail. Through Eliza, we see a potentially dangerous shift in conduct fiction narratives from the didactic message of *Charlotte Temple* warning young women about the dangers of seduction, to the reckless behavior of Eliza, who advocates a lifestyle free from parental and sisterly authority in a female community. Even though *Charlotte Temple* also demonstrates the negative effects of parental authority through the depiction of Charlotte’s disingenuous friends who often take advantage of her, *The Coquette* ultimately demonstrates what happens to a heroine when she only partially participates in a female community. However, despite the seemingly negative message of *The Coquette*, I believe

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<sup>18</sup> Defined by *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* as a “self-governing agent” who pays particular attention to “the value of self-integration,” or our attention to who we are “alien” or “at war” with. As a general rule, humans “alienate” themselves when their “intentions are not under [their] control” (Buss).

Foster ultimately uses the conduct fiction narrative in this story to expose the flaws in the patriarchal authority of the new republic, advocating for women to live like Eliza, exhibiting a lust for life that goes beyond filial duty, yet still relying on a functioning community of women for support, therefore allowing them to keep their virtue and remain unscathed from the judgment of their peers. Rather than influence women to behave in the meek manner that is the cause of Charlotte's troubles, Foster advocates for a more empowered woman who can govern her own affairs without fear of sharing Eliza's fate.

#### Femininity, Republican Ideology, and Community

Carroll Smith Rosenberg suggests a complicated construct of femininity in her article, "Domesticating Virtue: Coquettes and Revolutionaries in Young America." She suggests that femininity is directly influenced by the changing class structures in the new Republic. Middle-class women in the new Republic, figures that Foster and Rowson write of almost exclusively, are deprived of all opportunity to "support themselves independently" due to economic and class changes of the bourgeois and the displacement of criticism toward middle-class men by the gentry (27). "[T]he gentry accused middle-class men of venality of extravagance," which was then, in turn, passed on to women because of their "extravagances in dress and household management" (27). Though seemingly trivial to the study of female communities, this concept is actually quite pivotal to this thesis because it exposes middle-class womanhood as being dependent on patriarchal authority, which is written about often in literature from this time

period.<sup>19</sup> Even though Smith-Rosenberg's analysis of bourgeois women is correct—they did not have the means to economically support themselves in an independent manner—the flaw in her argument is in the word “support,” used without any clarification to the type of support suggested. Communities of women support themselves in many ways not suggested by Smith-Rosenberg, making them less dependent on patriarchal authority as they gather together in reading circles, academies, or in the home, or in the case of Eliza in *The Coquette*, writing candid letters to her most trusted friends. Smith-Rosenberg believes that Eliza's eventual downfall “was not lust but the desire for independence coupled with the wish to rise socially” (30). However, I suggest that Eliza's downfall can also be contributed to the failings of the women in her community. The juxtaposing dynamic between Eliza, Lucy Freeman, and Mrs. Richman impact the kind of advice that they give one another, therefore limiting the scope of their support to each other.

Charlotte, titular character of Susanna Rowson's novel, *Charlotte Temple* embodies the consequences of too much dependence on patriarchal authority as well as the consequences of keeping society with the wrong group of people. Marion Rust agrees that Charlotte lacks a distinct amount of control in her life, her one act of autonomy being the moment she hands her newborn baby to her father for protection (“What's Wrong” 107). The baby is the physical embodiment of Charlotte's fallen virtue and suggests, according to Rust, that “[she] would have

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<sup>19</sup> Sarah Scott's *The Test of Filial Duty* (1769) is a good example of the way duty and patriarchal authority impact female characters toward the end of the eighteenth century. Laura E. Thomason describes the text as a method of “criticiz[ing] parental suppression of young women's individuality” and suggests that the text ultimately criticizes “devotion to duty as synonymous with repression and painful self-denial” (385, 386). *The Test of Filial Duty* “accepts the necessity of marriage” but “examines how a moral, charitable, independent minded woman can marry without compromising her principles or losing what autonomy she has” (387). The text not only exposes the dependence of women on marriage in a kind of marriage economy, but also shows how duty intersects with the economic dependence on men that women faced throughout their lives, which is very much a theme in *The Coquette*.

been better off had she acted on any form of preference, even sexual desire” rather than being the “reflection of others’ wishes” (110). This quote is particularly important because it connects Charlotte and Eliza Wharton together by suggesting that Charlotte emulate Eliza in governing her own affairs. In this instance, Eliza’s life before her untimely end is the model for independent women. I believe Rust is implying that if women are going to lose their virtue, it is better to do so from independent thought and desire than from the influence of others.

The publication dates of these two novels are of particular importance. Since *Charlotte Temple* was published before *The Coquette*, we might conclude that Foster’s work is in direct response to Rowson’s. Claire Pettengill argues that “[w]omen ... assumed a unique burden ... to construct their gender in a way that would contain and reconcile conflicts present in the society as a whole” (185). As this thesis showed in chapter one, the new Republic was wrought with economic, political, and social changes that were reflected in the literature of the time. Eliza and Charlotte’s stories represent the “contradictory ideologies of womanhood,” according to Pettengill (185). Though she does not specify which ideologies of womanhood she speaks of, I believe them to be the republican mother and the autonomous female. However, it must be mentioned that though the *stories* represent the republican mother and the autonomous female, the *characters* do not. In fact, Eliza represents the failure of republican motherhood while Charlotte represents the failures associated from a lack of autonomy stemming from her filial duty to her naïve parents. Together though, the characters embody Foster and Rowson’s conversation with republican ideology and their dedication to teaching their readers how to function within an ever changing society. To help women cope, their novels became conduct

fiction and their stories became filled with examples of women who could have thrived while in the company of other women.

The changing culture of the new Republic was “anxious ... [to] inscribe [a] ‘woman’s place,’” according to Pettengill. She argues that “within the separate, domestic ‘sphere’ to which women were more and more confined, girls turned to their sisters” for support (187). She goes on to say that “female friends outside the family were perhaps even more important” than mothers and sisters in the household (187). Christopher Castiglia argues that the creation of separate spheres allows women to rally around one another within their “domestic confinement” (116). Home becomes a “common ground on which to gather, to sympathize, and to identify” (116). Women’s exclusion from the public gives them a shared identity that, “when shared with others in the same social category, provide[s] the basis of community” (116-117). Such communities allowed the women of the late eighteenth century to gather together in the home, their shared environment, and form a shared identity. Smith-Rosenberg believes that these shared identities existed in a shared networks that were “institutionalized in social conventions or rituals which accompanied virtually every important in a woman’s life, from birth to death” (“Female World” 9). Such “devotion” to each other became one of the few socially acceptable relationships that women were allowed to form (9).<sup>20</sup> More importantly, though, such devotion to one another allowed a space for women to support one another and benefit from the experiences of their peers. The “ties between sisters” ultimately extended into a network of female relatives, which “formed the structure upon which groups of friends and their network of female relatives

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<sup>20</sup> Smith-Rosenberg cites a number of ways women communed together including the sharing of household chores, support during sickness and grief, shopping trips, afternoon tea, and entire summers spent together (10). This eventually transformed into sewing circles, reading circles, women’s leagues, and improvement groups.

clustered,” forming the base definition of the female community (11). Their purpose, while showcasing a web of domestic support also allowed for the kind of support that could guide a young woman down the “proper” path should she sway in the wrong direction. Pettengill calls this “culturally significant sisterhood” (187).

I use Pettengill and Smith-Rosenberg’s analyses of the female community and extend it to my own research, suggesting that communities who fail to support one of their members are just as guilty of that woman’s transgressions as she is. With regard to *Charlotte Temple*, which boasts very little with regard to the female community, Charlotte suffers, not because she is an inherently flawed girl, but because the larger community of her school fails her by allowing her to get too close to La Rue, who is unfit as a teacher and as a reputable woman. *The Coquette*, in contrast, is representative of what could be a very successful community of women, if not for Eliza and her flawed sense of entitlement and need for independence. In both stories, the connective thread is how community fails the two main characters, which inevitably exposes Rowson and Foster’s position on duty and patriarchal authority, as they are the factors that dictate Charlotte and Eliza’s failures.

Despite the positive outcomes that often come from the solidarity of female communities, they can often fail and cause irreparable harm to those counting on it. Chambers-Schiller believes that sisterhood peaked at the “height of the consolidation of woman’s separate sphere ... beginning resistance to the domination of mothers” (148). For Eliza, her friends become the maternal figures to rebel against rather than the friends to confide in. Eliza needs the “support of sisterhood,” according to Pettengill, but as her sisters move on to marry and bear children, Eliza is left behind in her naïve attempt at coquetry as her sisters transform into republican mothers,

effectively driving Eliza away from their sound advice (196). Womanhood in general becomes more complicated when the private “woman’s sphere” fractions itself into groups of maternal figures and groups of sisters/friends. “Sisterhood,” a term once shared by a group of diverse women united in the bonds of domesticity, transforms into a fractioned group of women divided by their status in life. Mothers become the force to rebel against as the resistance to patriarchy and parents grew. In *The Coquette*, Mrs. Richman and Lucy Freeman’s advice is maternal in nature because of their close relationship with Eliza, creating a rift in their little community as their advice is shunned.

#### Lacking Autonomy: *Charlotte Temple*, Filial Duty, and the Seduced Woman

Before we can effectively examine Foster’s critical inquiry into women’s relationships with patriarchal authority and female communities, we must first examine how Susanna Rowson uses these ideas in *Charlotte Temple*. As an American best-seller, *Charlotte Temple* captured the interest of the country after it made its debut. This potentially posed two problems for the country, according to Marion Rust (“Introduction” xii). The first problem is that novel “could produce callous, lazy readers who were loathe [sic] to lift a finger to assist the less fortunate” and the second that “they were thought to create overexcitable [sic] readers with poor judgment,” making novel readers an unpredictable group who may not be able to “avoid in practice the pleasures they rehearsed mentally in a novel” (xii). With regard to Rowson, Rust also suggests that she would never have taught her own fiction in her school because of the subversive nature of the novel (xii-xiv). But the most perplexing of Rust’s statements comes from her assertion that *Charlotte Temple* was “inept” as a conduct manual, to which I respectfully disagree (xxvii).

There is a very important distinction between conduct manual and “conduct fiction,” which was defined earlier in this thesis. Conduct manuals are only didactic in nature and do not seek to reach wider audiences than the young women who were often presented the works as a gift.<sup>21</sup> Conduct fiction, to reiterate the concept from the previous chapter, blends a didactic message in with a more typical narrative structure – in this case, the sentimental genre – to reach a wider audience and provide opportunities for women to think critically on a subject, either on their own or with a friend, reading circle, or improvement group. In this way, conduct fiction is an advocate for the formation of female communities and an advocate for women’s education.

Though Rust’s assertion that Rowson’s career as a novelist had to take a backseat to her career as a preceptress because “there was no way to ensure that an author cured, rather than created, hapless readers” is true, I believe her definition of Rowson’s work as a failed attempt at being a “conduct manual” does not address the multi-faceted ways many female authors use the novel to address their readers and the social issues of the time. It is important to view texts whose authors have strong ties to education as at least partially educational in nature. In this manner, *Charlotte Temple* helps expose early America’s fear of seduction as well as Rowson’s own opinion on filial duty’s influence over America’s youth. According to Rust, America’s fear of seduction stemmed from its fear of “[u]nsanctioned pregnancy” because it “threatened the optimism of a newly developing moral and cultural system that emphasized man’s capacity for self-determination” (“What’s Wrong” 106). In short, seduction threatened the foundation that the new nation rested on by corrupting not only the moral systems that the country was advocating

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<sup>21</sup> Hayes explains that “parents bought such books for their adolescent daughters,” which would “be endowed with authority beyond the written text,” effectively giving the parent a little more authority over their children by suggesting that the message in conduct manuals reflect their own opinions as well (59).

but the republican ideology of virtue that was such an important foundation to the new nation's success.

Davidson also comments on the fear of seduction by suggesting that “[t]he reverse of the proper marriage was the improper affair,” which was “a major theme in sentimental novels” because it addressed

the problem of illegitimacy, [which] had an obvious social relevance. In a nation unsure of its own birthright, questions of parentage could well be asked. A country that had only recently broken from a reviled mother-country might wonder who the real mother was, England or the revolution? (“Mothers and Daughters” 119)

It then became of the utmost importance for the fledgling country to show that their mother was the revolution and that its citizens were not illegitimate offspring of rebel British colonists but born of the legitimate desire for independence. Seduction was the enemy of the new Republic not only because of the consequences for its citizens (especially the female population), but because it threatened the legitimacy of country itself. *Charlotte Temple*, and by extension Rowson, exposes these fears in showing a respectable young woman easily succumbed by the agents of moral and political discontent.

Despite the novel's title, Charlotte is not the first character we are introduced in the first chapter of *Charlotte Temple*. In fact, the very first appearance of Charlotte in the story is told through the perspective of Montraville, who remembers “[a] tall, elegant girl” looking at him on the street and “instantly” recognizes her as “Charlotte Temple, whom he had once seen and danced with at a ball at Portsmouth” (Rowson 9). What is interesting about this moment is that

Rowson gives us another character's perspective, and a cad's perspective at that, of Charlotte in the first page of the story, suggesting that from the beginning Charlotte has no autonomy in her own life. By the end of chapter one, Montraville has bribed Charlotte's French teacher, La Rue, to "bring her young charge into the field again the next evening," further proving that other characters shape Charlotte's future, giving her even less control over her own affairs (11).

Charlotte remains absent from the story until Chapter VI, her story given way to the history of her parents and their own battle with autonomy. Unlike Charlotte, her parents choose to rebel against their parents and forge a life on their own, poor, and "attended by Love and Hymen" only living on "three hundred a year" and access to "many of the little elegancies of life" (25). Jay Fliegelman suggests that "the importance of personal autonomy and individual identity insisted upon the right and obligation of all children to become fully autonomous and self-reasoning adults" (3). Charlotte's father forges an identity for himself by "[fighting] his father" and "declar[ing] his resolution" to marry a woman below his station, showing Rowson's clear opinion on filial duty which suggests personal autonomy more important than one's duty to parental authority (24). However, Fliegelman's assessment of personal autonomy, though inclusive of both genders, does not take into consideration the hardships women faced when defying parental authority.

Young women were totally reliant on their relatives for support until they married. If Charlotte were to fight her parents, it would leave her essentially destitute as she would have little money and even fewer skills to employ herself. Rowson specifically addresses women's reliance on their family in her portrayal of Charlotte's duty to her parents. They have high expectations for their daughter and believe that she "will never lose sight of the duty she owes

her parents” (34). “Owes” is particularly powerful word to use in this instance, suggesting that Charlotte is indebted to her parents for their care of her. However, if we return to Fliegelman’s analysis of parental duty, we know that “it also insisted upon the complementary responsibility of parents to encourage that transition from adolescence to adulthood,” making it the Temple’s duty to rear Charlotte to be autonomous as well as virtuous, not assuming that duty (and fear of financial abandonment) will force her to behave correctly (3). In this manner, they fail their daughter.

Charlotte’s education at Madame Du Pont’s school should have prepared her for her duties as a wife and mother as well as for her own personal betterment, but since Madame Du Pont herself found it “impossible to attend the education of a numerous school without proper assistants,” Charlotte’s education was set aside by an “assistant [who was] not always the kind of [person] whose conversation and morals were exactly such as parents of delicacy and refinement would wish a daughter to copy (Rowson 26). This assistant, La Rue, “lived with several different men in open defiance of all moral and religious duties” before her teaching career began, giving her undue and unwarranted influence over such a naïve character as Charlotte (26). Fliegelman agrees that those “deformed in character” are not to blame because the blame should fall on “those negligent teachers and self-absorbed parents who permitted their children’s fall” (2). The evidence presented by Rowson suggests that she also subscribes to Fliegelman’s sentiment. In creating a teacher, someone who by all tenets of republican motherhood should be an example of the moral mother, who blatantly flouts societal norms, Rowson ultimately suggests that the type of women a woman surrounds herself with is of vital importance to her own character

development.<sup>22</sup> Because Charlotte is isolated from her own mother and in a small community of women who are not attended over very well in school, the people she surrounds herself with form a mini community that operates exclusive of the bigger community of Madame Du Ponte's school, making La Rue her number one influence.

Even though La Rue has an extreme amount of influence over Charlotte, Rowson still establishes that she knows the difference between proper and improper behavior. She expresses her feelings adequately enough to La Rue in saying "I cannot think we have done exactly right in going out this evening," yet is immediately cast aside when La Rue replies, "It was your own fault, then ..." (29-30). Their conversation goes forward in this manner until Charlotte mentions that Madame Du Pont would be angry if she found out they went out that evening. Here, the conversation takes a turn for the worse, exposing just how much of a hold La Rue has over Charlotte. She says:

perhaps your mighty sense of propriety may lead you to tell her yourself: and in order to avoid the censure you would incur, should she hear of it by accident, throw the blame on me: but I confess I deserve it: it will be a very kind return for that partiality which led me to prefer you before any of the rest of the ladies; but perhaps it will give you pleasure ... to see me deprived of bread, and for an action

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<sup>22</sup> Davidson suggests that "[a] good daughter of the republic would refuse to be swayed by the blandishments of a seducer who, like Montraville ..., was typically aristocratic and generally British (either by birth or aspiration). Instead, she would settle for the simpler homespun pleasures of connubial bliss and maternal satisfaction. Motherhood was thus meted out as both the reward for virtue and the punishment for vice" ("Mothers and Daughters" 119). In this case, the moral mother should be the reward for adhering to the principles of republican motherhood as well as the reward for acting as the positive example for the young women who look to them for guidance. But, Bloch suggests that the moral mother in the literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were "singularly unidealized" subjects, which were often "denigrated" rather than celebrated, as Davidson suggests (100). *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* both present mothers and/or mother figures who generally mean well, but cannot be the moral mother figure at the head of many female communities because of either their own emotional absence and/or past transgressions.

which by the most rigid could only be esteemed an inadvertency, lose my place and character, and be driven again into the world, where I have already suffered all the evils attendant on poverty. (30)

La Rue carefully manipulates Charlotte into believing that La Rue's well-being hinges upon Charlotte's conscience and her debt to her teacher for favoring her over the rest of the students at the school. "The less Charlotte credits her own instincts, the more her behavior is described as a form of collapse, in which her future direction is determined by nothing more deliberate than her center of gravity" (Rust, "What's Wrong" 102). What Rust suggests is that Charlotte fights a losing battle against her teacher, a woman she is supposed to emulate according to tenets of republican womanhood and the female community. Charlotte's instincts are correct, they are virtuous, and they show that it is ultimately Charlotte's lack of personal autonomy that keeps her from being a successful woman. Not only is she duty bound to her parents, she is now duty bound to a manipulating adulteress who forces her to constantly second guess her instincts.

Just as La Rue manipulates Charlotte's emotions, so does Montraville. Knowing very well that "it was impossible he should ever marry Charlotte Temple," he continues to toy with her emotions until she admits that nothing "could be so painful to her as that of never seeing him again" (Rowson, *Charlotte* 41, 42). Montraville then uses this opportune moment to strike asking, "Then you love your parents more than you do me, Charlotte?" knowing very well that her filial duty will prevent her from agreeing (42). When Charlotte speaks the truth and expresses her duty to her family, he further makes her question herself by saying "I find I have deceived myself with fallacious hopes ... But farewell [sic] Charlotte! I see you never loved me. I shall now welcome the friendly ball that deprives me of the sense of my misery" (42-43). Rowson

uses this exchange to show Charlotte's inability to stand her own ground—a fact which Rust believes is her “failure to become an agent, as opposed to an instrument of her destiny” (“What’s Wrong” 107). Her own lack of agency prevents her from becoming an autonomous subject, able to see through the ruses of La Rue and Montraville and surrounding herself with the sort of people who will allow her character to shine rather than become tarnished. In essence, Charlotte's naiveté fully keeps her from forming the relationships needed to succeed in life because she constantly allows herself to be manipulated by those more cunning than her. We can see this manipulation as Charlotte surrenders her virtue to Montraville. Rust addresses this as not “giving up under duress something she values” but to “lose track of it altogether, along with every other aspect of her being” (“What’s Wrong” 102).

Since Rust believes Charlotte's failures ultimately show the difficulty “young American women” had with enfranchising themselves during a time when “powerful ideologies of womanhood that were an at best unwieldy fit with the mechanism of agency in the new republic,” Charlotte most certainly represents the problem women faced in gaining personal autonomy (107). Republican womanhood, one of the “powerful ideologies” Rust writes of, does not necessarily always allow women agency and autonomy. The ideology expects compliance with standard educational practices and traditional gender roles. I might also suggest that filial duty is another of the powerful ideologies present in the new Republic keeping women from personal autonomy. Charlotte's lack of agency is most certainly a problem, but what is more problematic is that she acknowledges her filial duty to her parents yet still allows herself to literally be swept away in a carriage, bound for America and a life corrupted by those whom she trusts the most.

As a negative example for young women, Charlotte not only represents the failure of parents to raise a child in accordance to the standards of the new Republic, but the failure of Charlotte to form lasting relationships with those around her. Instead, her life is dictated by the manipulative, and her duty to her parents all but exhausted by her shame and inability to write a letter asking for help until it is too late. As we learned from Rust earlier in this section, Charlotte's one and only act of autonomy was in handing her baby over for protection to her father. She learns important lessons too late and can only redeem herself by ensuring her child is well provided for upon her death. In this manner, *Charlotte Temple* becomes conduct fiction, meant to show women the importance of personal autonomy and the impact of filial duty on their lives. In addition, it also exposes America's fear of seduction and the need for conduct fiction to expose women to the dangers of allowing themselves to be seduced. This is, in part, the reason why women's education and the female community became so important in early America.

#### Resisting Republican Motherhood: Eliza and the Fight against Duty and Sisterhood

Unlike Charlotte, Eliza Wharton has enough personal autonomy and is not afraid to govern her own life. However, the end result of Eliza's quest for self-governance is ultimately the same fate as Charlotte's, death in childbirth. What is interesting to note when comparing these novels together is how different the heroines are in character, yet so similar in their ultimate fate. Though *Charlotte Temple* is a cautionary tale illustrating the failures of parental duty, the impact of filial duty on personal autonomy, and the consequences when a woman lacks a community, *The Coquette* is ultimately a novel of resistance to republican motherhood, feminine duties, and the sisterhood of the female community. Because *The Coquette* was

published three years after the first American publication of *Charlotte Temple*, I suggest that Foster's work is in direct response to Rowson's, suggesting that they had differing opinions on womanhood, but ultimately the same goals regarding education and the support women needed to be successful.

Fliegelman argues that "novelists, poets, playwrights, and anonymous authors of didactic periodical fiction" formed a solid community together in an effort "to anatomize the family" and to "define the familial, the parental and social duties" of the time period (9). Though it is evident from the fiction of the early Republic that this is true, I believe Rowson and Foster differentiate themselves from the other authors of the time period by questioning the very duties that Fliegelman suggests they are trying to define. Just as Rowson questions filial duty's impact on Charlotte's personal agency, Foster uses *The Coquette* to comment on republican motherhood and the way filial duty impacts Eliza's decision to sow her wild oats, so to speak, and live life according to her own rules. Though Rowson uses filial duty as a means of questioning a woman's personal autonomy in the new republic, I believe Foster takes a different stance, using Eliza as an example in defense of republican motherhood instead of in question of the social mores in place that led Eliza to her demise as Rowson does with Charlotte. In defending republican motherhood, Foster is also defending the need of female communities in a woman's life. However, she inserts a caveat in this defense: all members of the community must be republican mothers or it will ultimately fail. Lucy Freeman and Mrs. Richman are exemplary representations of the ideal republican mother, making Eliza the odd woman out and the reason why her community fails.

Questioning Eliza's agency has never been an issue for scholars studying *The Coquette*. Eliza shows her personality as well as her agency in the first few pages of the text.<sup>23</sup> In a letter to her dear friend, Lucy Freeman, Eliza exposes to us that her life was previously defined by the "nature and education" instilled in her "an implicit obedience to the will and desires of [her] parents," essentially forcing her into an arranged marriage with a minister she feels no love for (Foster 5). Eliza explains to Lucy that his death has taught her "the fading nature of all sublunary enjoyments, and the little dependence which is to be placed on earthly felicity" (6). An event that should have made Eliza a little more mature and sober has effectively made her see the fleeting nature of life and vow to never take life for granted. Her concluding remarks to Lucy state that she wishes "for no other connection than that of friendship" (6). Eliza's only relationship with man was not out of love but out of filial duty, a relationship she vows never to have again, asserting agency by proclaiming her indifference toward romantic love. This alarms Lucy, who replies with a "moral lecture" emphasizing the negativity associated with being labeled as a coquette (7).<sup>24</sup> Within the first few pages of this text, we are introduced to Eliza's character: a strong woman who is unhappy with the direction her life was heading. The death of her fiancée gives her the opportunity to start her social life anew and she vows to make the most of it, having learned from his death that life is too short to cultivate anything other than a joyous existence.

We are introduced to one half of Eliza's community, Lucy Freeman Sumner, a member who, through moral lectures and advice, attempts to sway Eliza's thinking from that of a coquette to that of a socially sound republican mother who wants nothing more than to make a

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<sup>23</sup> Laura H. Korobkin lists Eliza's social graces as including "wit, humor, intelligence, liveliness, a strong sense of self, and an even stronger interest in controlling her own life" (81).

<sup>24</sup> Coquette is a term more modernly referred to as a flirt.

strong marriage match and raise children. The second half of this community is Mrs. Richaman, a friend of the family. A silent member of this community, and a member very often ignored, is Eliza's mother, Mrs. Wharton. After the death of Mr. Haley, Eliza leaves her mother's house and travels to New Haven to stay with the Richmans. Unlike Charlotte, whose parents do not sanction Charlotte's travels, Mrs. Wharton embraces Eliza's trip, applauding her "fortitude" and the "philosophy [she] exert[s] under ... [her] heavy bereavement" (7). I call her a silent member of Eliza's community because she is absent from Eliza's communications for most of the story. This is one area where Rowson and Foster disagree. While Charlotte's parents are absent from their daughter's story and have little influence over her actions, Mrs. Whitman is indeed a present figure in Eliza's life and plays an important role in Eliza's story toward the end of the novel. With their support, Eliza, by all definitions of the female community, should have been able to lead a virtuous, domestic lifestyle. Yet she chooses, in an act of agency in itself, to disregard their moral lectures and become the master of her own life.

Davidson suggests that the novel "does not openly challenge the basic structure of patriarchal culture but, instead, exposes its fundamental injustices through the details and disasters of the plot" ("Introduction" xv). This is particularly represented in Eliza's community, who "worry constantly about her marital prospects, for she does not have an inheritance of her own" (xv). Davidson goes on to explain that Eliza's support system, who could have encouraged her to support herself by taking a job, only encourages her to find a husband that is economically self-sufficient (xv). In this manner, they show the injustice served to women who have no man to support them. Eliza's father and fiancée are both dead, leaving Eliza and her mother in a precarious financial situation. As inheritance laws for women were flimsy, a fact that Lucy, Mrs.

Richman, and Mrs. Wharton are most likely well aware of, they understand the consequences of alienating oneself from a “good match,” a potential future husband, thus their insistence that Eliza marry, and marry quickly. In emphasizing marriage, they do not challenge patriarchy, most certainly exposing Foster’s opinion that republican motherhood is the gold standard for which all women should strive for. Like Davidson says, they do, however, expose many of the fundamental injustices women had to face in the early Republic, one of the most alarming being fiscal stability.<sup>25</sup>

Davidson also points out that class is another injustice women face as they marry. Women must “marry not only into his class but into his occupation as well” (xvi). This leaves Eliza little choice in her own life. She “recoil[s]” at Reverend Boyer’s profession, worried about the misery inflicted by “a class of people, who will claim the right of scrutinising [sic] every part of [her] conduct,” which further seals her mind against ever marrying or forming a connection with another man (Foster 29). Even though Lucy, Mrs. Richman, and Mrs. Wharton all approve of Eliza’s match with Reverend Boyer, Eliza remains decidedly firm on the subject of marriage to yet another minister: she will not marry him. Yet, rather than state her rejection of him explicitly, she leaves him wondering about her intentions, insistent on being allowed “the exercise of [her] free will,” which may or may not be in agreement with his wishes (29). Rowson and Foster’s relationship with class is not particularly perplexing or revealing; they both write of characters in the middle class who are not overly concerned with upward mobility, but cognizant

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<sup>25</sup> Davidson explains that even wealthy women in the new republic were still “dependent on a husband’s good sense and goodwill” and that “[a]ll women [were] thus potential paupers, married women especially so” (“Introduction” xv). Without a husband “to provide for her” and “lacking the skills to earn her own living, a woman’s situation” could be very “desperate” (xv). See also, Karen A. Weyler, “Marriage, Coverture, and the Companionate Ideal in *The Coquette*” for more information on marriage and coverture in the new republic, especially pages 3-6.

of the fact that their livelihoods depend on domesticity and good marriage.<sup>26</sup> However, Davidson's assessment of class is particularly important here because it plays a crucial role in the dynamic of Eliza and her community. I believe the class issue is referenced to give Eliza yet another reason to rebel against the sisterhood trying, in vain, to keep on her the right track. It is yet another social more for Eliza to rebel against in her quest for personal freedom.

Korobkin suggests that Eliza's rebellious, flawed character ultimately represents Foster's idealized opinion on what America's "most significant virtues" were (82). Though I believe "idealized" too harsh a word to describe Foster's opinion, I do agree that part of Foster's intent for this novel is to expose the kind of flawed characteristics that would ultimately lead to the ruin of the country. In juxtaposing the positive feminine qualities of Eliza and her inherently flawed logic, Foster is advocating for a strong woman who does not feel entitled to live a lavish, luxurious lifestyle at the expense of her reputation. Eliza's community does try to sway her back on the path to righteousness and virtue, but ultimately fails because they inherently act too much like the maternal figures that she is rebelling against to begin with.<sup>27</sup>

At the beginning of the novel, Eliza makes it quite clear that her duty and "sacrifice" to her parents' wishes "risk[ed] [her] future happiness" and that she would be less than willing to repeat the unfortunate situation (Foster 5). Lucy Freeman's constant lectures and propensity "to

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<sup>26</sup> Foster's *The Boarding School* is exclusively comprised of middle class women at a modestly run school where simplicity is emphasized as of greater importance than living luxurious lifestyle or upward mobility. For an example of a "simple" girl in a house where luxury is emphasized, see Foster 114-16. See especially 142-46 for didactic lessons about the necessity of simplicity in the correspondences between Anna and Maria Williams. Rowson's *Reuben and Rachel* depicts characters forced into the lower middle class by war and political turmoil, only to go on to great financial success later in the novel. See references to Isabelle and Columbia Arundel Gorges political and financial history, 103-108. See also the descendants of Columbia who renounce all financial fortune in favor of a modest American lifestyle for their children, 367-69.

<sup>27</sup> See Eliza's reference to Lucy's "moral lecture" (7).

tell disagreeable truths” only give Eliza more fodder to rebel against. Lucy constantly advises her than Peter Sanford “is a rake” (26). Despite addressing her as “my dear friend,” a greeting which exposes not only their friendship but their intimacy with one another and their closeness within their community, Lucy’s conjecture on how “a lady of [Eliza’s] delicacy and refinement, think of forming a connection with a man of that character” only sounds to Eliza like unwelcome, unsolicited, and maternal advice (26). What Eliza really wants is for someone to agree with her and to tell her everything she wants to hear as a part of her own egotism and self-entitlement. Instead of giving Eliza what she wants, Lucy strictly adheres to the supportive principles of the female community and the ideology of republican motherhood to try and sway (or if evidenced by Eliza’s stubbornness, shove) her back on the path to virtue. She does so by giving a particularly timely warning:

Let me advise you then, in conducting this affair; an affair, big, perhaps, with your future fate, to lay aside those coquettish airs which you sometimes put on; and remember that you are not dealing with a fop, who will take advantage of every concession; but with a man of sense and honor, who will properly estimate your condescension, and frankness. Act then with that modest freedom, that dignified unreserved which bespeaks conscious rectitude and sincerity of heart.

(27)

Lucy’s speech not only warns Eliza about Sanford but about Boyer as well. Just as Sanford is a rake, Boyer is the honorable man who will not wait for her to fall in love with him. Lucy’s maternal advice continually pushes Eliza away.

Eliza's ultimate rejection of the community comes when she runs away with Peter Sanford and succumbs to seduction, resulting in an unplanned pregnancy that leaves her destitute, alone, and completely isolated from the sisterhood that so vainly tried to save her. She realizes too late that the friendship of her community of women could have saved her from the miserable conditions of her present life. In her last letter, Eliza writes:

I am going from you ... This night separates us, perhaps for ever! I have not resolution to encounter the tears of my friends; and therefore seek shelter among strangers; where none knows, or is interested in my melancholy story ... Should it please God to spare and restore me to health, I shall return, and endeavor, by a life of penitence and rectitude, to expiate my past offences. (156)

In her last letter, Eliza expresses her deepest regret for her actions, endearing herself to her friends, which ultimately suggests the regret she feels for having not heeded their warnings. Foster uses this letter as one final moment that reinforces the tenets of republican motherhood and the necessity of female communities to her readers. Had Eliza heeded their advice, she could have lived a prosperous life with a man who loved her and gave her financial security, a facet of womanhood that all women had to worry about.

If this chapter shows us anything, it's that women had to continually band together to live within the powerful ideologies of patriarchy and republican motherhood, created to give women a specific role in life. In the case of *Charlotte Temple*, Charlotte could not live in such an environment because she did not have the luxury of a female community to support her. She was consistently and constantly controlled by the more powerful people in her life. Conversely, *The Coquette*'s Eliza Wharton has much personal autonomy, to her detriment by the end of the story.

Because she is so independent, she does not appreciate or understand the supportive role of sisterhood in the community of women she confides in. Ultimately, Rowson and Foster use these texts to show their female readers that female communities are necessary and integral to successful integration into the female community of republican motherhood.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: SUSANNA ROWSON LOOKS TO THE FUTURE IN *REUBEN AND RACHEL; OR, TALES OF OLD TIMES***

*Reuben and Rachel; or, Tales of Old Times* (1798) represents the culmination of ideas regarding republican womanhood, women's education, and female communities in the late 1700's. This late piece of conduct fiction not only shows some of the same principles of womanhood, education, and sisterhood, but also new ideas regarding the way the nation should conduct itself toward its women and its minorities. In short, Rowson uses it to suggest new directions for the fledgling country regarding its treatment of women and minorities. By using the text as a commentary on the state of the nation, she moves the country one step closer to having a national literature which represents the interests of its citizens.

Rowson sets up this novel as a text written for young readers about the history of America told through the eyes of ten generations of people descended from Christopher Columbus. She admits that it is written specifically to educate young women during a time when "the generality of books intended for children are written for boys" (39). The undertaking of young women's education becomes her primary focus after she finished writing of *Reuben and Rachel*. She writes in the preface to the text:

Flattered and encouraged as I am in my present undertaking, in having the education of so many young ladies entrusted to my care by their respectable parents, it shall henceforward be my study conscientiously to discharge the trust reposed in me; and whilst I endeavour to cultivate their taste, and improve their understandings, implant, with the utmost solicitude, in their innocent minds, a love for piety and virtue. (39)

The preface to *Reuben and Rachel* illuminates much to us in terms of Rowson's position on educating young women both through her novel and in her school. She shows readers that the basic tenets of a woman's education are piety, virtue, and a strong interest in history and geography.<sup>28</sup> Marion Rust believes that Rowson's educational principles aimed to lay in a "middle ground" between "ornamental skills that characterized early Republican education" and the "pragmatic skills" used by Benjamin Rush in the Young Ladies Academy of Philadelphia (*Prodigal* 261). This "middle ground" may mean that Rowson acknowledges the tenets of republican womanhood and the need for women to retain their domesticity as well as the need for strong educational reform that would allow women a stronger role in the economic and political arena of the United States.

Rowson's professional curriculum shows a more radical trend than the ideas present in the works of Murray and Foster as well Rowson's earlier work, *Charlotte Temple*. Not only does Rowson show powerful evidence supporting women's education in *Reuben and Rachel*, she also emphasizes the importance of female communities. But what sets *Reuben and Rachel* apart and seals Rowson's position as an author of the future is her dedication to social change. In addition to showing Rowson's dedication to women and education, she also uses the text to comment on the nation's treatment of Indians, suggesting that the country revise its policy on racial equality.

#### Pedagogy, Conduct, and Community in *Reuben and Rachel*

The historical backdrop of *Reuben and Rachel* coupled with Rowson's admission in the preface that the book is intended as historical pedagogy demonstrates the efficacy of considering

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<sup>28</sup> Susanna Rowson wrote a geography textbook titled, *An Abridgment of Universal Geography* for her students in 1805.

the practical curriculum in Rowson's writing. However, *Reuben and Rachel* depicts more instances of ornamental pursuits than scholarly subjects. For example, the importance of letter writing, filial loyalty, and female companionship also find themselves in the text. For an author navigating the "middle ground" between the pragmatic and the ornamental, *Reuben and Rachel* does not fit. The ornamental subjects take the forefront in *Reuben and Rachel*, leaving history and geography, the subjects she emphasized the most in her work with young women at Mrs. Rowson's Young Ladies Academy, in the background. Can we attribute this discrepancy between Rowson's professional life as an educator and her professional life as a writer to Rowson's professional growth? Despite the contention that the text was originally written as a practical pedagogical piece, this text is still considered "conduct fiction" because its story imparts lessons on its readers.

By the addition of history and geography into her conduct fiction, Rowson opens up her texts to be read in a pedagogical manner. She also shows an understanding that the majority of women in the United States do not have access to female academies or may not be interested in learning the practical subjects she emphasizes in her school. In order to give her readers lessons in both the practical and the ornamental, she must emphasize the ornamental in the plot of her text in order to attract her readers while using the text itself as a practical pedagogical tool. Simply put, as her readers proceed through *Reuben and Rachel*, they learn vital lessons for women via the behavior of Rowson's characters. For example, Rowson's plot demonstrates how to be a filial child and the importance of maintaining virtue; the simple *act* of reading the text imparts practical lessons to young women. By reading, the audience can practice the subject of reading and learn about history and geography at the same time.

Rowson conveys to her readers a well-rounded education, much like the education they would receive had they enrolled in her school. By making education accessible to everyone through her reading, she also comments on novel reading itself. In general, reading novels was frowned upon in the early Republic because they were thought to negatively affect a woman's ability to make sound judgments and lead her emotions in the proper direction. All in all, novels were considered a bad influence on America's youth. However, the writings of Rowson are different. Her dedication to education and to the women of the early Republic makes her novels stand out – in that they seek to educate the minds of women, not befuddle their sensibilities. *Reuben and Rachel*, out of all of Susanna Rowson's works, is the representative example of these ideas because it is one of the few novels she wrote that actually addresses the education of women in both the ornamental and practical senses as well as the need to rethink the role of the novel in a woman's education.

*Charlotte Temple* conveys a singular message – educate women to avoid seduction, lest they befall Charlotte's fate. What this novel does not address, however, is education in general. Rowson is merely commenting on the need to teach women to think for themselves in order to avoid becoming manipulated by any cad who fancies their virtue, not the need for a general overhaul of the educational practices available to women. We can attribute this difference to the fact that Rowson had not yet opened her Young Ladies Academy and was therefore not completely devoted to educational reform as she was after her school opened.

The story of *Reuben and Rachel* opens with a strong emphasis on women's education. She opens the story with Columbia, a young woman living in religious exile with her widowed mother, Isabelle, and their servants, Cora and Mina. These ladies form a community in the

countryside where Isabelle seeks to teach Columbia and Mina the attributes of what makes a virtuous lady. Most importantly, Isabelle “[is] fully sensible of the necessity there [is] for checking those ebullitions of vanity, which, if suffered to pass unnoticed, w[ill] effectually throw a shade over the really valuable qualities of good sense, good nature, and benevolence” (Rowson 43). Isabelle, secluded from the world, seeks to be “the guardian of [her] daughter’s morals,” directing her “in the way most likely to secure her present and future happiness” (43). Isabelle is acting as the teacher to Columbia and Mina, wishing to guide them into womanhood by teaching many of the same lessons young readers would find if they were enrolled in a boarding school or seminary. Rowson gives Isabelle the qualities of a matron at a boarding school to show that learning begins at home, no matter the family’s economic circumstances.

In the early Republic, a family’s economic circumstance dictated and ultimately changed the way education was thought of for young women. Mary Kelley argues this point and believes that the “convergence of a market revolution” transformed the lives of all Americans by giving them access to more capital accumulation, which resulted in a shortage of available land (*Learning* 4). Once rural America was unable to provide dowries for their sons and daughters, they looked to education as “an alternative endowment” for their children (4). What we can see from Kelley’s argument is that eighteenth century education shifts from being a luxury to a necessity. In allowing education to become the substitution for dowries, the early Republic sets the stage for women’s mainstream entrance into society. We can see evidence of these ideas in Isabelle, who has no dowry to give her daughter when it comes time for her to marry. All she can do is educate Columbia to the best of her ability and hope that the man she chooses appreciates a strong, virtuous mind rather than a large dowry.

The most important lesson for Columbia is that the blessings bestowed upon people by God do not always remain, especially with regard to beauty. Isabelle makes this clear when she asks, “and what does my child so intently gaze at?” when Columbia stops for a moment to gaze at her reflection in a pool of water (45). Isabelle goes on to lecture Columbia on beauty, saying that it is “less than a shadow; for beauty itself is but a shadow, scarce seen before it is gone; and that fair semblance you there behold is but the shadow of a shade” (45). To fully impart her lesson, Isabelle throws something in the water to distort the reflection and insists that her daughter look at the beautiful figure now “deformed” and “disgusting” with “every trait of loveliness gone” (46). Though harsh, Columbia’s lesson is learned. Beauty is fleeting and vanity will not lead to happiness. This same lesson can be found in *The Boarding School*. Mrs. Williams also warns her students about the dangers of vanity and tells them that though beauty is a desirable quality, it is also “transient as the meteor, and frail as the bubble” (Foster 52). She then tells them the story of Flirtilla, a superficial young lady whose “fashionable education added the allurements of art to those of person, and rendered her a finished coquette” (52). Flirtilla believes beauty is everlasting and spends her days “in the chase of vanity” when suddenly she was stricken with smallpox and reduced to “the contrast of what she once had been” (53). Her lovers were “disgusted with the change, and sought more pleasing object of attention; while men of sentiment could not find a similarity of disposition, in her, to induce a connexion [sic]” (53). It is clear that Rowson and Foster have similar opinions on the nature of vanity and the importance of education. Isabelle seeks to inspire Columbia with “a thorough contempt for all frivolous pursuits, and to give her a just sense of the value of mental acquirements” (Rowson 47). At the same time, Mrs. Williams tells her students to take a moment for inward reflection and to “exert [their] unwearied industry

to amend” any faults they may find (Foster 55). Both authors essentially believe that beauty is not meant to be valued over education and that a woman’s mind is her most important asset. Beauty fades. Knowledge does not. With this in mind we can see that *Reuben and Rachel* imparts similar messages to those found in conduct manuals.

*Reuben and Rachel* shows the diversity of women in early America and is meant to ultimately guide readers through the process of selecting their friends wisely and creating a supportive community from those choices, casting off the patriarchal authority of the new Republic in the process. Unlike *The Coquette* and *Charlotte Temple*, *Reuben and Rachel* is representative of prosperous female communities that support the heroine in her endeavors. What sets the novel apart is its attention to the inherent need for women to commune together and support each other in a time when women were expected to remain in the home. Rowson crafts *Reuben and Rachel* to be a piece that encourages women to form communities and band together in the face of adversity. Isabelle and Columbia Arundel are a mother daughter duo who is forced to create a community for themselves when they flee from Mary Tudor into the wilderness to live in “an antique castle ... fallen to decay” (41). They, along with servants Cora and Mina, form a small community dedicated to the preservation of the feminine ideal, which Isabelle instills daily in Columbia. Here, Isabelle checks the “ebullitions of vanity, which, if suffered to pass unnoticed, would effectually throw a shade over the really valuable qualities of good sense, good nature, and benevolence” in Columbia (43). Here we can see similarities to *The Coquette* as Isabelle lectures the importance of good sense and good nature over vanity. Eliza’s community of women lectures of good sense as well. But, the varying degrees of efficacy in both situations suggest that lecturing on the importance of good sense does not automatically guarantee success.

What differentiates Isabelle from Lucy Freeman and Mrs. Richman is her ability to lecture and teach without passing judgment on Columbia. Lucy and Mrs. Richman, however, lecture and pass judgment upon her, creating an unstable environment for Eliza. She inevitably stops confiding in her community of women because their judgmental attitudes alienate her from what should be a supportive environment. Rowson seems to understand the need for a supportive environment, especially as Isabelle debates “the exquisite pleasure of participating ... every wish of her innocent heart” with her “duty” to “be the guardian of [Columbia’s] morals” (43). She does not wish to alienate her, but to guide her down the path of morality and virtue with as lovingly a hand as possible.

But, Rowson also uses Mina to juxtapose Columbia’s supportive and loving environment. Mina learns the same lessons as Columbia, only by proxy, as she is constantly by Columbia’s side. She ultimately does not fare the same fate as her mistress, however, because Isabelle does not take a direct hand in her upbringing. In allowing Mina to watch Columbia, she is allowing Mina access to the vital components of the community they share. But, by being held as an outsider by Isabelle, Mina’s fate as a hopeless coquette is sealed. Here, Mina has the most in common with Eliza because they are both outsiders who have only marginal interaction with women who can guide them. Rowson juxtaposes Mina and Columbia to show the complicated nature of the female community and what happens when it does not function exactly as it should.

Columbia and Mina are not the only examples of women in or in need of a female community in *Reuben and Rachel*. Rachel Dudley is the daughter of Reuben Dudley and is the descendant of Columbia. Rachel and her brother, Reuben, lose their father in a shipwreck and are forced to make their own way in life. Reuben tries his fortune in America while Rachel is left

to the care of relative Hezekiah Penn and his wife, Tabitha. Instead of welcoming Rachel into her household, Tabitha works hard to make life miserable for Rachel, especially with regard to her moral character. She believes Rachel to be an “unthinking and unfeeling girl” who turns to “vanity, folly, and abomination” for allowing a suitor to escort her home (238). In reality, Rachel is a “good girl” who is often a favorite of those who know her (232). Her tumultuous home life with Hezekiah and Tabitha is representative of the folly that occurs when older women in a community feel jealous or outraged against younger members of the group. Once jealousy permeates a community of women, it becomes an unstable and hostile environment. This is evident in Rachel’s case when Hezekiah dies, wanting to “give her half” of his estate. Tabitha, however, has different plans and manipulates her dying husband’s words. Hezekiah’s dying words are to “to give her,” which Tabitha interrupts “50 or 60 guineas.” Hezekiah replies, “No ... give her half” (242). Tabitha manipulates the situation to leave Rachel a total of 30 guineas, which is hardly adequate to support a young woman who must now live on her own. With this situation, Rowson suggests that not all communities of women support each other. If Tabitha had stopped ruling the young women of the house with a “rod of iron,” perhaps she might have found solace in their company rather than contempt of their fortunes of youth (237).

As Rachel is forced to leave her home for a second time, she has no other choice but to take her money and flee to her friend, Jessy Oliver, in London. Rachel boards with a Mrs. Webster, her three daughters, and a single woman named La Varone.<sup>29</sup> Together, these women form a misfit community that becomes a hostile environment that corrupts Rachel’s good

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<sup>29</sup> I cannot help but note the similarities between La Varone and La Rue of *Charlotte Temple* here. Perhaps Rowson is showing a kind of anti-French sentiment in her portrayal of two French women who act as bad influences.

manners and sensibility. Mrs. Webster, in the matriarch position of the household, is “a woman of moderate understanding, devoid of knowledge, and with a very small share of curiosity” who had to “work extremely hard at her business . . . to support her family” (247). All together, these women are “unfit society” for a young lady of Rachel’s social status and upbringing (247). Yet, Rachel craves companionship and embraces Mrs. Webster and her misfit community of boarders with a whole and open heart, leaving herself vulnerable to the influence of less than scrupulous people.

Rachel makes plans to “apprentice herself” to someone in London so that she may “render herself independent” because independence, in her opinion, is just as important as “inherited wealth or titles from . . . ancestors” (258). However, her time in Mrs. Webster’s boarding house corrupted her sense of independence because “La Varone had ever some new scheme of pleasure to propose” and “juvenile indiscretion” overcame her until “the last ten pound note was broken in upon” (258). Here, Rowson uses Rachel to show how negativity impacts members of a community of women. Mrs. Webster is an ineffective role model for young women and is ill equipped with the knowledge necessary to guide young ladies who look up to her. She, essentially, does not conform to the tenets of republican womanhood, which becomes necessary for successful female communities to function properly. Rachel cannot flourish in an environment where republican motherhood is not a valued trait in women. Under Mrs. Webster’s “care,” Rachel “los[es] the desire of employment, [and] the wish for independence” (258). Rachel has similar qualities to Charlotte Temple, which suggests Rowson’s growing concern with who young women associate themselves with. Rowson creates

characters in both *Reuben and Rachel* and *Charlotte Temple* who suffer negatively at the hands of unscrupulous women when they are forced away from a supportive community of women.

La Varone, Rachel's friend in Mrs. Webster's deficient community, acts as the catalyst that prompts Rachel's bad behavior. She is a chameleon who can "assume any character she pleas[es]" while still "careful to preserve appearances" (261). Though overly fond of "luxury, show, and expensive pleasures," she is practical enough to understand that her expensive pleasures come at a price and that she must marry well in order to keep her lifestyle. She knows that "the season of conquest [is] past" and that she must "secure a permanent establishment for herself before old age and neglect overt[akes] her" (261). La Varone seduces a wealthy gentleman smitten with Rachel during their time in the same boarding house.

Under her influence, Rachel changes from the virtuous woman that she was to a borderline version of Mrs. Webster and La Varone. Her ambition for independence decreases and she does not care that her money is soon to run out. She is taken advantage of financially by the household as she is kind hearted enough to pay Mrs. Webster's five pound debt but never paid the money back. She is only redeemed upon meeting her love interest, Hamden Auberry, at the theatre. Once he is back in her life, she straightens up her act and returns to the search for a job to support herself. But, only Hamden can remove Rachel from the abject group of women consuming and corrupting the very principles that Rachel lives her life by.

Marriage to Hamden is the only way to escape her situation, yet it is not the best option for Rachel, either. In marrying Hamden, she becomes increasingly isolated from the world and is removed from the company of women entirely. In this situation, Rachel falls victim to gossip and her reputation is ruined. She is forced "to go by the assumed name of Dacres" because her

husband is fearful of his wealthy aunt. He “sacrifice[s] the reputation of a virtuous woman” to keep his inheritance intact leaving Rachel to “[brave] the censures of the world” (278). Rowson uses this situation to emphasize that marriage alone does not protect a woman’s virtue or reputation. Women, like Rachel, need the safety and security of positive female influence during times of hardship because the principles of republican womanhood can be reinforced and a positive environment can be provided for women to associate themselves with. Because Rachel does not associate herself with women of quality character during her time with Mrs. Webster and her time under the assumed name of Mrs. Dacres, she exposes herself to critical and negative attention by the public. She ruins her reputation and further alienates herself from society because she lacks supportive female friends who guide her through trying and difficult times.

Rachel’s relationship with childhood friend Jessy Oliver and aunt, Rachel, is the only positive interaction she has with educated women who place morals and virtue above all else. These women provide a stable and supportive environment that fosters Rachel’s character. Her character and virtue depends on their involvement in her life. Once her aunt dies and Jessy’s involvement in her life diminishes, Rachel loses the very support system that keeps her on track. Jessy Oliver is the very embodiment of the principles of republican womanhood. She leaves her parents’ home when she is about to be forced into a loveless marriage and goes into hiding. She and Rachel do not see each other again until Rachel is forced out of her home by the negative gossip that follows Rachel around due to her naiveté regarding the nature of appearances. They find each other again in the country, where, after a series of misunderstandings, Hamden Auberry has left Rachel, bound for England a disgraced man. Jessy and Rachel form a plan that allows them to follow Hamden but rely on Jessy’s “little annuity” should “worst come to the

worst” (349). Jessy suggests that, should Rachel be unable to reunite with her husband, they should “come together ... in humble, but contented independence,” making a living on what “industry shall supply” (349). Jessy proposes they reform their community to live together as a family, using their education and industry to support themselves in America. Rowson reunites Rachel with her support system to help guide her through immigrating to America and finding her husband, a task that might have consumed her had she been alone. If anything, Rowson suggests that the support of a loving community is more important than any kind of personal independence. Without the help of Jessy, Rachel would have certainly been left destitute and with a ruined reputation. Instead, she contributes to the success of the Dudley family by showing that fortitude and hard work are the foundation of happiness. It is Jessy who reunites Rachel with her husband, securing the love of Reuben in the process and helping seal the fate of the Dudley family by helping bring forth a first-born generation of children who do not have to rely on fortune because fortitude is the only American quality that dictates success.

*Reuben and Rachel* teaches us that proper conduct is the foundation for success. Just as Mina and her descendants show that improper conduct taints a bloodline for generations, Columbia and her descendants prove that proper conduct warrants a successful future. In this instance, Rowson is showing her readers the kind of foundation they need to be successful citizens of the nation. They are to mold themselves after Columbia, who is named for the founder of North America<sup>30</sup>, and establish themselves as legitimate descendants of the new nation rather than illegitimate transplants of the British Empire. In addition to creating a national identity for

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<sup>30</sup> Now known to be untrue.

the country, she also establishes the need for equality between the sexes by advocating for a proper education for women as well as the need for women to commune with other women, forming a close-knit community that provides every opportunity for success. All in all, Rowson does not take a different approach to conduct fiction than the other authors that we have read in this thesis. Her radical opinion really lies in her vision of the nation and its position regarding equality.

### Rowson Looks Toward Equality in the Nation's Future<sup>31</sup>

Not only is *Reuben and Rachel* conduct fiction for young women, it is also conduct fiction for the nation. Rowson uses this novel to redirect the nation's predisposition for racism and classism toward a more inclusive stance regarding who should be considered citizens in the new nation. By using two different genres with an interim storyline, Rowson is able to juxtapose the current racial and classist tension with a more inclusive direction the country could take. Volume one uses the captivity narrative genre to empower the text's half-Indian female voices otherwise silenced in American culture. The second volume switches to the genre of the sentimental novel in order to take away female authority and reaffirm gender and cultural oppression in eighteenth-century America. I propose that Rowson intentionally constructs a division between each volume to expose eighteenth-century social practices and critique the direction of the American national identity. She reconciles this division by inserting a storyline that fits in both the captivity narrative as well as the sentimental novel. Volume one uses an

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<sup>31</sup> This section was originally published as "Forming a National Identity: Reconciling Genres in Susanna Rowson's *Reuben and Rachel* in *The Journal of Research on Women and Gender* 1 (2010): 116-35 and is repurposed to include my most recent research on Rowson, women, and education.

inversion of the captivity narrative to represent Rowson's idealized vision of America—the America where women have active voices, Indians are represented as human beings, and the deserving are rewarded for their suffering. Volume two, conversely, represents the American reality—a reality of fear, suffering, savage Indians, and disempowered women. The Dudley family story acts as the metaphorical bridge by portraying women as both independent and dependent beings regardless of their race. It creates balance in an otherwise imbalanced text — showing Rowson's investment in the nation building process by presenting a solution to gender and race issues in the nation and then devolving her ideas into a storyline that more accurately represents the social direction of the country.

*Reuben and Rachel* is a matriarchal origin story where volume one acts as a fusion of cultures that portrays miscegenation as an acceptable social practice for the new nation. Columbia, the central protagonist in volume one, is the part Indian great-granddaughter of Christopher Columbus. Rowson describes Columbia as “possess[ing] a heart glowing with the strongest feelings of humanity” (42). She gives Columbia these characteristics despite the idea that she is a “half breed,” part Indian and part European, who would never fit in Rowlandson's text because of her desire to prove the savagery of Indians based upon her own experience with them. Columbia's heritage is passed down from generation to generation to William, who marries Oberea, daughter of an Indian sachem, who continues the mixed bloodline through the rest of the text.

The inclusion of mixed-bloods into the text is a fairly controversial act because of the inherent racism present in early captivity narratives after the publication of Mary Rowlandson's *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God*. Rowson “inverts, reverses, and undoes Rowlandson's

racism” because American Indians become nature’s noblemen while the European men are represented as the savage barbarians (Smith-Rosenberg, “Captured Subjects” 188). This is best represented early in volume one when Ferdinando and Orrabella sail for Peru. Upon their arrival, they find the palace of her father deserted and the island controlled by rogue Spaniard banditti. Garcias, chief of the banditti, insults Orrabella’s father by calling him a savage. Orrabella defends her father by comparing his “humanity, honour, patience, [and] fortitude” to the amoral banditti who call him “savage” (Rowson 80). Clearly, Rowson is inverting Rowlandson’s opinion of the Native Americans she encounters by representing them as honorable human beings, which immediately calls into question Mary Rowlandson’s opinion of the “savages” that keep her captive. As she is being taken away by the Indians Rowlandson says, “Now away we must go with those Barbarous Creatures, with our bodies wounded and bleeding, and our hearts no less than our bodies” (70). She still believes that Indians are savage beasts even after they show her some modicum of kindness by feeding her and giving her a Bible. Could this misreading of the natives be Rowlandson’s way of politicizing her novel in favor of the newly termed “Euro-Americans?” Rowson’s inversion of Rowlandson’s text might certainly prove so.

In the hands of Rowson, though, the Native Americans are noble-savages, the bearers of half European children who grow to embody a vision for America that is based upon inclusion. More importantly, Rowson’s Indians are powerful females who contribute to society. Her mixed-blood characters exhibit more authority than Rowlandson’s depiction of Indians allow. Columbia, as only a child, saves another child from the plague. As an adult, she has the fortitude to stand up against powerful, evil Mary Tudor in an attempt to keep her Protestant faith. The idea that Columbia will “defy all threats” (Rowson 131) and tortures parallels the characteristics of

the budding American nation, defying all threats and tortures from the British Empire, willing to sacrifice everything in the bid for freedom. Steven Epley argues that the “female characters in the novel are judged by their willingness and ability to think and act for themselves, while respecting the rights of others” (50). If Columbia is a metaphor for the nation, then Epley’s argument reflects what Rowson believes the nation should embody—a nation of people who respect all who contribute to it.

Columbia and her part-Indian descendants represent an idealized American national identity which is based on inclusion rather than exclusion as the building blocks of the nation. They also represent the basic characteristics of eighteenth century America, making *Reuben and Rachel* an allegory for the nation (Smith-Rosenberg, “Subject Female” 498). Columbia is ultimately rewarded for her suffering during her captivity under Mary Tudor by reuniting with her love, Sir Egbert Gorges, who was thought to be dead in a plot to convert Columbia to Catholicism. Her suffering is directly linked to the suffering America endured under the British Monarchy in the years before the American Revolution with the message that those who suffer for their causes will be rewarded. Rowson’s general message for volume one is essentially that America is only as good as those who are included in its foundation. The marginalization of Indians as represented by Rowlandson portrays a nation based upon exclusion. Rowson’s inversion of this idea creates a vision of America where all are included and admitted into a nation began by those fleeing from oppression and being silenced themselves. Rowson’s inclusion of otherwise silenced voices in her text gives the nation a “tradition to live up to and complete” (140). She essentially gives America the map and the key to becoming a better nation. Inverting the captivity narrative helps establish the American half of Rowson’s transatlantic

identity by revealing her compassion for marginalized subjects and her desire for a newly revised American national identity.

There is an interim storyline, though, which resides in volume one and volume two, that does not quite fit in either. What this storyline does, however, is act as the bridge that reconciles Rowson's ideas in the story. In volume one, William Dudley, descendent of Columbia, marries a white woman, Arrabella Ruthven. Dudley and his wife are Puritans and flee England in hopes of a life free of religious persecution. They live an isolated life in the country, reliant upon themselves for all of their wants. Their idyllic lifestyle is described by Rowson as "their wants were few, and those few were amply supplied; plenty presided at their board, and cheerfulness was a constant inmate in their dwellings" (168). But, their isolated lifestyle comes back to haunt them when neighboring Indians raid their farm and abduct two of their children, teenager William and two year old Rachel.

At this point it seems as if Rowson has completely forgotten everything she tries to prove in volume one. Savage Indians, much like the savages in Rowlandson's text, raid the farm. "They [Indians] dispatched them with their tomahawks, and stripping off their scalps, kept them as proofs of the endeavours to extirpate the English from amongst them" (Rowson 171). Rowson's tone here becomes harsher when discussing the Indians. They are no longer "nature's noblemen," but savage beasts who only think to eradicate the English from their land. What comes next is an interesting turn of events. Rather than befalling a gruesome fate as the tone of the prose suggests, William and Rachel are adopted by the tribe's sachem, Otooganoo, rather than being tortured and killed. Otooganoo loves William like a son and allows him to marry his daughter, Oberea. "You have been to me, young Englishman, a friend, a companion, an

instructor, now above eight years. I love you with sincerity, and I believe you love me” (Rowson 183). William’s parents, on the other hand, have not fared well since the Indian attack, suffering from “almost every species of affliction which human nature can endure and live” (180).

Rowson surprises her readers with this shocking comparison of the Dudley family’s lives. According to what we know of Rowlandson’s text, William and Rachel should have befallen misfortune because of their capture by savage barbarians. The hard working Puritan family *should* have escaped the savagery of the Indians, but they did not. What, then, is her message? She exhibits some harsh anti-Puritan sentiment and is critiquing the idea of liberal individualism, which focuses on the individual and the individual’s freedom from government regulation, represented by the Dudley family’s self-reliance and freedom from the government. The textual evidence above supports the idea that she discourages liberal individualism and in therefore in favor of civic republicanism, which focuses on the individual sacrificing for and participating in the creation of the common good. Unlike Columbia, who sacrifices her own freedom so she, and others like her, can keep their religion, the Dudley’s do not make any sacrifices and do little for the common good of the nation, making them the enemy, not the Indians. Epley takes a rather negative stance on Rowson’s use of civic republicanism saying that her use of it is essentially destroyed by any economic or social dependence on another; “only personal independence can allow a citizen to strive for the good of the whole rather than the interest of those on whom he is dependent” (52). According to Epley’s definition, though, the Dudley family should not have endured such hardships because their personal independence suggests that they are protected from harm. Epley’s mistake comes from the study of each volume as a separate entity rather than treating the text as a homogenous whole.

The Dudley family story exists as an interim storyline that does not quite fit in with the ideas presented in either volume. Volume two tends to focus on fear, savages, silent women, and sentimentality. The Dudley's only embody the first two characteristics. But, even the Indians are not represented as purely savage. They may raid and kill, but they also adopt two white children and care for them like their own, keeping with the noble savage motif presented in volume one. It also acts as the transition from the captivity narrative to the sentimental novel. It shows Rowson's ability to blend and blur the genres and seeks to prove that the American national identity does not have to use concrete rules for inclusion into the nation. Volume one examines the American nature of the captivity narrative while volume two adheres to more of an English sentimental novel than an American tale. The Dudley story exists as both, reconciling the gap between each by portraying noble savages as well as powerful and powerless women.

The beginning of volume two still tells the story of the Dudley family, but focuses more on the lives of William and Rachel, living prosperously with the Indians and creating another generation of half-Indian children who, like Columbia, are an allegory for Rowson's idealized nation. William and his Indian wife, Oberea, have a son, Reuben, who is dark skinned like his mother. Upon William's death, Oberea, Rachel, and young Reuben return with Arrabella to England, where he is educated as an English gentleman and given all the privileges of such. Reuben's dark skin is the most important characteristic to remember. Would such a dark skinned boy be given the privileges of a gentleman in Rowlandson's work? Rowson allows him such privileges to show the transition from captivity narrative to sentimental novel because it is his descendents who carry on the story. Reuben marries a woman who dies in childbirth, bringing

twins Reuben and Rachel into the world. Their story makes up the bulk of volume two and in their story lies the true narrative split from volume one.

Reuben Sr. travels back to America to establish land along the Delaware River. He is highly prosperous and upon his return to England with his fortune, he entrusts his land to an untrustworthy fellow. Reuben Sr. drowns in the English Channel, leaving his children poor and fending for themselves. Reuben Jr. then decides to travel to America to reclaim his father's land and fortune. The young Reuben exhibits the same social prejudices as men portrayed in the late eighteenth-century, rather than following in the footsteps of his ancestors by falling in love with an Indian woman. Reuben Jr. takes on "the identity of [the] white male hunter and merchant" (501) who joins the Pennsylvania militia to fight against the Indians. Scholars often discredit volume two at this point because the shift in message is too strong for most to try and reconcile. However, since we see the same prejudices against Indians in the Dudley family storyline, we cannot completely discount Rowson for creating a disjointed text. She does create a seamless story that exhibits both American and British ideals, represented by Columbia and Reuben Jr. Columbia represents the struggle for freedom in the early nation while Reuben Jr., educated as an English gentleman, represents British imperialism.

Reuben is captured and is saved by a Delaware chief's daughter, Eumea. She helps him to escape and follows him back to Pennsylvania in hopes of marrying him. But, again, Reuben rejects his cultural heritage and chooses not to marry her in favor of marrying a white, wealthy woman. As Smith-Rosenberg remarks, "His future must be pure, white, and (agri)cultured ... Rowson too must change her European authorial voice ... concerned with legitimating white claims to American land" (501). Rather than marry an Indian, Reuben chooses to conquer the

Indians by attempting to remove all traces of Indian blood from his family line. In essence, Rowson gives up on the idea of the authoritative “half-breed” and has given white Americans the authority over Indians, making volume two an example of the nation’s social practices in 1798. Rather than continue fighting for freedom and inclusion as Columbia’s storyline suggests the nation to do, the nation staggered and began adhering to the same British principles that they fought so valiantly against.

Reuben Jr. is not the only character Rowson uses to mark the shift from captivity narrative to sentimental novel. Rachel also represents such a shift, and interestingly enough, it is Rachel’s storyline that takes up the most space in volume two. Despite the fact that Rachel is marginalized enough to be confined to her home “employed at her needle” or “reading” (Rowson 307) instead of being off on adventures like her female ancestors, it is Rachel’s story we read the most, not Reuben’s. Smith-Rosenberg argues that volume two focuses on the “dilemmas a young woman faces in choosing a good husband” (“Subject Female” 500), rather than following a male on his adventures, Rowson chooses to have us follow Rachel on her quest for a husband because she seeks to educate the women who read her work. Rather than have Rachel befall the same fate as Charlotte Temple, she allows readers to follow a virtuous woman on her quest to find and keep a husband. The sentimental nature of the text exists not only to educate Rowson’s female readership, but to show America that the education of women is the only way to protect them from the pitfalls of society. Isolating and marginalizing women only makes protecting their virtue harder than it should be.

Rachel marries a cad who leaves her to tour England with his aunt. Forced to hear rumors that suggest her to engage in socially unacceptable practices, she is forced to find her husband to

eradicate the rumors. “As soon as Rachel had gathered strength sufficient to enable her to attempt it, with slow and uneven steps she proceeded . . . determined to make inquiry herself a concerning letter; for she thought it impossible for Auberry to abandon her and his child to absolute want” (346). Rowson’s prose here is representative of the shift in genre, relying on emotion rather than action to drive the plot.

She finds her husband in America, where he has properly atoned for his actions and they resume an acceptable marriage. Castiglia adeptly notes that “the virtue and happiness of good, domestic women reflect the virtue and happiness of the nation” (153). Rowson must give her characters the sentimental happy ending they deserve in order to preserve the nation’s women. Rachel gives women in post-Revolutionary American a standard to strive toward. Nevertheless, Rachel still does not have the same agency as the women in volume one. She still marries and adheres to the social practices of the time, legitimizing Rowson’s need to address the role of women in the American nation.

On the surface, Rowson must give volume two the legitimacy needed to guide her readers, but she also uses it to caution them against trusting in such a masculine dominated society. Eighteenth-century society demands sentimental fiction that represents the fear and savagery of the Indians, and happy endings for all. In order to give America a text worth reading, she has to disassociate herself from her idealized nation in volume one and create a story true to the real vision of America, where women seek husbands and even part-Indians reject their cultural heritage in favor of a white, heteronormative lifestyle. She, essentially, uses volume two to placate the nation after allowing her transatlantic principles to dominate the text.

Rowson created *Reuben and Rachel* toward the end of her writing career, making it the climax of the formation of her political thought. Her life as both an English and American citizen affords her the opportunity to critique American based on her own transatlantic principles. She saw the country excluding non-white men and women of all color from active participation in the nation. As an active writer, she was only allowed a marginal role in the formation of the American national identity. As her fame grew, so did her sense of civic duty. Educating women became her top priority in the hopes of creating a sub-culture of women who would make sound decisions and not have to rely solely on masculine society. She uses these principles to guide her when writing *Reuben and Rachel* where she inverts the captivity narrative to display Indians as noblemen and women as strong characters. She then relies on the sentimental novel in the next half of her text to represent the social conditions present in the American national identity. While she does reconcile these genres by the insertion of an interim storyline, I cannot help but think that her intent was to highlight the nation's flaws to as many women as possible—hoping for enough women to realize that a real society can only exist when all are included.

Such a multi-faceted text can only be interpreted as Rowson's way of educating and guiding her readers toward forming their own conclusions about equality between races and equality between the sexes. Like her contemporary female authors, Rowson understands the need for personal accountability in all things, including opinion forming. She gives her readers the opportunity to read along with characters who have an unfettered love and curiosity for one another in order to form their own conclusions about the most controversial topics of the time period: women, education, conduct, and equality. Though she cannot play an active part in changing the country due to gendered politics, she can attempt to educate and persuade her

audience to do so through her fiction. This, to me, is the epitome of conduct fiction – the ability to teach lessons in an attempt to change the world.

## CONCLUSION

Examining the conduct fiction written during the 1790s reveals the changing ideologies of women's place as members of society and citizens of the new nation. During the Revolution, women were asked to help with the war effort by buying local, wearing homespun, and sacrificing luxury items for the sake of the war effort (37-39).<sup>32</sup> According to Kerber, women were quickly becoming politicized and showing just how capable they were of the challenge.<sup>33</sup> As women were increasingly politicized, they became "active participants" in the war effort (2). This active participation gave them the legitimacy and politicization needed to establish themselves as equal bearers of enlightenment philosophy's most important tenet: reason. If women could establish themselves as reasonable human beings, they could show that they were worthy of an education.

The ideology of republican motherhood allowed women such access to education. Nash concedes that "the husbands of educated women would be more virtuous" and their children "educated to civic responsibility," but she also asserts that a good education would prepare women for "any life role" that included anything *but* wifely duties and motherhood, especially education (*Women's Education* 16, 10). After being allowed access to education, women could shape it according to their needs. However, a woman's access to education varied in its availability, with many unable to attend traditional female academies. Instead, they created reading circles where they "read and discussed everything from theology to history to

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<sup>32</sup> Kerber makes it clear that not all women were patriots and that many still remained loyal to the British crown.

<sup>33</sup> Kerber cites examples of women's policing of local merchants "who hoarded scarce commodities" (43). These women "went to great risks" by helping American prisoners escape (55), and those who had to support their families by "cooking and washing" until their husbands returned (55).

astronomy” and presented “formal essays to the group, drawing from what they had read and applying those lessons to the issues of the day” (29).

These lessons and issues often applied to history. Nina Baym writes that “history held the place of honor in the hierarchy of literary modes, and knowledge of history was perceived as an essential element in the education of the American citizen” (2). Studying history gave women the opportunity to “discover that the need for educated women was itself a historical phenomenon since it had not existed in earlier times,” creating what Baym calls a “cultural moment” that “encouraged and required the presence of women in the print circuit” (2-3). In essence, reading circles allowed women to read and discuss various historical subjects, negotiating a space that encouraged women’s participation in history making.

Making and teaching history is particularly important to Susanna Rowson’s text, *Reuben and Rachel; or, Tales of Old Times*. Told from a historical perspective, it seeks to establish women in the framework of history. As established in chapter four, Rowson’s attitude toward women changes from her earlier work, *Charlotte Temple*. *Reuben and Rachel* depicts strong female characters who educate themselves in a variety of different manners rather than tragic heroines who succumb to life’s weaknesses. Rowson gives the characters in *Reuben and Rachel* access to strong female communities when the lessons they must learn are particularly important. Using history as the backdrop for this novel allows readers to place women at the center of history and thus, at the center of the nation. For example, Rachel and Jessy Oliver’s expedition to America ends with a renouncement of British wealth and title, suggesting that the true American citizen values character over title. According to Rowson, titles are “distinctions nothing worth, and should by no means be introduced into a young country, where the only distinction between

man and man should be made by virtue, genius, and education” (368). If not for the community formed between Rachel and Jessy, the Dudley family would not have had the fortitude to persevere and achieve success. Rowson gives readers access to this fictional history so they can see just what it means to be a true citizen of the United States. As this history is dominated by women, I would suggest that Rowson wanted readers to reconsider women’s role in nation building and citizenship. Women’s access to education gave the ability to participate in the nation. Rowson’s writing took this idea one step further by suggesting that they were an integral part in forming the nation’s character.

Of course, Rowson’s ideas regarding the nation might not have been possible without Judith Sargent Murray and Hannah Webster Foster’s contributions to early American literature. Both authors challenged the idea of republican motherhood and what it meant to be educated as a woman. Just as they were influenced by Mary Wollstonecraft, I believe *Reuben and Rachel* was the culmination of Murray and Foster’s influence on Rowson. *The Story of Margaretta* exposed readers to a woman who was completely autonomous in the decision making regarding her daughter’s education. It also depicts a young woman who almost fell victim to seduction, but was saved at the last minute by reason. Without these ideas, Rowson might not have been as successful with the autonomous women depicted in *Reuben and Rachel*.

*The Boarding School* gave readers access to educational curricula and the idea that women’s relationships with one another were solidified through communication with one another. These ideas influenced *Reuben and Rachel* by suggesting that women’s access to healthy female friendship was absolutely vital to their success as virtuous women and productive citizens of the United States. Unlike Eliza in *The Coquette*, who did not participate in such a

community, the women in *Reuben and Rachel*—Isabelle and Columbia Arundel especially—helped one another through the trials in their lives to become healthy, successful women. Columbia’s success as a happily married woman and devoted mother set the tone for the novel, suggesting that the success of the nation’s women held a direct correlation to the outcome of its future generations.

This project looks to the future by suggesting that the sentimental literatures of the 1790s are more than just cautionary tales that warn against seduction. Their classification as conduct fiction allows for a much closer and dynamic reading of these texts, opening them up for new interpretation and criticism.

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