

MISBEHAVING MOTHERS: TEXTUALITY, MOTHERHOOD, AND
LEGITIMACY IN EARLY PURITAN AMERICA

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“LEGITIMACY” IN EARLY PURITAN AMERICA

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT
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“LEGITIMACY” IN EARLY PURITAN AMERICA

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Single mothers, widowed mothers, abandoned mothers, impoverished mothers, and criminal mothers are just some examples of women who lived outside the normative societal standards that prevailed in colonial New England. And in an attempt to determine the ways to deal with these illegitimate practices, reactionary representations of these women began to emerge in the culture. Deviant, or perhaps even better, *unregulated* motherhood was in fact a space very much contested, a space that represented illegitimacy to some and empowerment to others. This space was immersed in politics and religion and in issues of race and class. Further, it was a space that was at once both private and public. This dissertation examines how mothers came to occupy a space so contested, looking at documentary and literary accounts of unregulated motherhood in seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth-century America.

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INTRODUCTION

MISBEHAVING MOTHERS: TEXTUALITY, MOTHERHOOD, AND “LEGITIMACY IN EARLY PURITAN AMERICA

Benjamin Franklin’s “The Speech of Miss Polly Baker,” a satirical text published in 1747, features the fictional Miss Baker who is called before a Connecticut court for the fifth time for “having a Bastard Child.” In the text, Franklin allows Miss Baker to voice her frustrations over the many punishments she has endured for having children out-of-wedlock, including fines and public whippings. Franklin gives single mothers, albeit a particular population of single mothers, a voice as he allows Miss Baker, who makes her living as a prostitute, to make a convincing and logical defense of her actions. Included within her rhetorical brilliance is the argument that as a woman who was forsaken by a man who promised to marry her, she had few options. She trusted this man (who she states is now a top court official) and believing that he would marry her, she engaged in an intimate relationship with him. Yet after he abandoned her, pregnant, she had no choice but to use what was available to her to support herself and her child. She tells the court and the readers that she in fact does have a good job supporting all her children (five now, children being an occupational hazard in her line of work), and she does not have to rely on the government for help. Indeed, Baker makes the argument that she could do even better for her children if the government would quit fining her for having them.

Yet another of Baker's arguments relies on the notion that children are a gift from God and a gift to the nation, as more people mean more taxes. She states that her profession, which she believes is honest because she does not "entertain" married men or underage men, is providing a service to all those members of the male population who are too afraid to enter into the commitment of marriage and family, a clear shot at the double standard that perhaps is still evident even today regarding the sexual mores of men and women. She insists that she would be a good wife, and has all the necessary criteria that a good wife should have, honesty and frugality being two traits she specifically mentions. In fact, she stresses that she wants to be someone's wife. But perhaps Baker's strongest argument centers upon the question of the nature of her "crime." She feels her crime is a moral one, not a civil one, and she states that her punishment can be found in the fact that every church in town refuses her as member. If she is already punished by God and by the church, then why is she also being punished by civil law? This question forms the thesis of Franklin's text: church and state must be separate.

Franklin's text is one that allows the unregulated mother a chance to escape the punishment she has endured when her appeal to the judges is so convincing that one of them is actually "induced to marry her the next day." Thus Miss Baker is, on one hand, forced back into the folds of cultural normality and "legitimized" with the marriage; however, on the other hand, the heavy satire that permeates the text suggests the absurdity of the notion that such a "deviant" woman would marry a prominent local official, much less articulate a sophisticated political argument in the public domain. The significance of this text, of course, is the appearance of the fictional single mother character, Polly Baker, and why Franklin chose to situate her within his political satire,

his argument for the separation of church and state. Some may attribute the choice to Franklin's well known ironic humor, but in fact, Franklin chose the perfect example to lead his argument, for single mothers, perhaps beyond any other member of early American society, embody all the struggles between church and state, between civil law and religious law. Therefore, not only does the choice of a single mother work well in Franklin's satire, but single mothers also fit neatly into this paradigm of illegitimacy that this dissertation explores.¹

Under the watchful eye of a society that is seeing the definition of "family" rapidly changing, single mothers remain a point of contention. On one hand, single motherhood is trendy, at least according to Hollywood standards. A quick overview of Hollywood-backed romantic comedies such as *Knocked Up* and the inundation of high-profile celebrities like Halle Berry embarking upon single motherhood support the notion that to be young, beautiful, financially stable, and single with a child is a lifestyle that seems to fascinate many. On the other hand, however, single mothers remain the scapegoat for many societal problems, with politicians across the board blaming epidemics such as crime and poverty on single parent households. Indeed, the past two US Presidents have attempted to discourage single mothering, with former President Bill Clinton (who was in fact raised by a single mother) urging women to "just stop" having children out of wedlock and former President George W. Bush securing millions of dollars for a government-backed marriage campaign that, among other things, encourages single mothers to marry, an apt reflection of the immense political leverage enjoyed by

¹ Nathaniel Hawthorne's choice of Hester Prynne in *The Scarlet Letter*, who by most accounts could be considered a "single mother," also figures into this argument.

radical conservative Christian organizations.² Furthermore, current US President Barack Obama, also raised by a single mother, used the occasion of his first Father's Day in Office to speak upon the importance of fathers stepping up and helping to support children who were born to them out of wedlock.

American society seems to have always been intrigued by single motherhood, resulting in varied and complex representations of single mothers flooding American culture over the centuries, from colonial times through the present. Perhaps, however, it is less about the notion of these women being single, but more about the notion that they are doing something that is beyond the normative boundary of American culture, which is also why other mothers who step beyond the customary established guidelines of motherhood also receive much attention, like those mothers who murder their children, for example.

However, while the label of "single mother" may be what garners the attention of modern American society, legitimacy was most crucial in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century America. Marital status, of course, mattered for mothers, especially women who were pregnant, but their adherence to established societal regulations mattered more. Societal reaction to "legitimacy" is, in fact, the key issue to explore. Furthermore, this legitimacy should not be confined just to birth and/or marriage, but should also include the woman's adherence to (or lack of) gender norms, or, in other words, the "legitimate" ways of behaving in colonial America. Race and social class play a role in the way

² Furthermore, the Moynihan Report (1965), authored by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, alleged that the black single mothers threatened the authority of black men, which contributed to the social and destruction of the black nuclear family.

legitimacy is defined. In fact, the definition of “legitimacy” is not linear at all; there are many markers of legitimacy and illegitimacy that I explore in this dissertation.

Single mothers, widowed mothers, abandoned mothers, impoverished mothers, and criminal mothers are just some of the examples of women who live outside the societal standards that prevail in seventeenth and eighteenth-century America. Each woman in this dissertation is aggressively regulated so much so that when she dissents, she begins to move outside of the societal boundary lines in an unregulated, illegitimate space. And in patriarchy’s attempt to determine the ways to deal with these illegitimate practices, representations of these women thus begin to emerge in the culture; as a result, society is forced to react—to law, to literary portrayals, and to media representations. Unregulated (or in some cases hyper-regulated motherhood) was in fact a space very much contested, a space that represented illegitimacy to some, like Cotton Mather, and empowerment to others, such as Nathaniel Hawthorne. This space was immersed in politics and religion and in issues of race and class. Further, it was a space that was at once both private and public. In this dissertation project, I examine how these mothers came to occupy a space so contested, looking at documentary and literary accounts of unregulated motherhood in seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth-century America. In this dissertation, “illegitimate” describes a behavior or action that strays from that which would be considered the accepted norm by the traditional Puritan authority system (and its legacy), including criminality, breaching the divide between the public and private domains, ignoring and/or violating implicit gender norms, and sexual relations outside of a sanctioned relationship. These examples are all behaviors that the Puritan power structure would deem illegitimate and/or sinful.

This dissertation employs a variety of texts to explore different mothering situations to build upon the work of scholars such as Laurel Thatcher Ulrich and Cathy Davidson, in that it examines the lives of unconventional women to shift the way we view the paradigm of motherhood. Motherhood is often viewed as a basic, normal, and expected social obligation for women in early America, but examining it in different contexts illustrates the rich influence that gender and gender norms had upon the social dynamics in early America. Furthermore, this project applies a feminist cultural studies approach to illegitimate or non-normative motherhood in America during the established timeframe to examine various portrayals of unregulated mothers within the context of the historical moment in which the depiction was produced and consumed. Motherhood, here, is explored in the broadest sense of the word, with different women from different social perspectives considered. Working primarily in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century America allows me to trace the trajectory of the single mothers and others engaged in unregulated mothering practices while also examining the formation of American society's cultural values, which help define, among other things, normative family structures.³ The place of these "illegitimate" women in American society has long been fluid as the nation emerged with its own laws and own cultural mores that affected these women, and we see their representations in literature and popular culture shift to sometimes accommodate and sometimes wrestle these changing ideologies. Society reacts to the women, and the women react back; what is said and also what is left unsaid

³ For a classic discussion of marriage and motherhood in early New England, see Nancy F. Cott's *The Bonds of Womanhood*. Here, she examines the distinctions between the roles that married and unmarried women had, as well as the effect that motherhood had upon the life of a typical woman during this time.

(or what is written but also what is left unwritten) therefore matters. The relationship of the mother to the text is a complex one, and we must mediate the various voices present.

In order to fully understand the eighteenth-century construction of legitimate-versus- illegitimate motherhood, the seventeenth century's legal impact upon the eighteenth century is significant. Eighteenth-century literary representations of single motherhood seem to highlight the moral and religious consequences for women who might choose to live beyond socially accepted boundaries, but the legal status of these women also plays a factor in analyzing these texts for the complexities women faced living under the restraint of normative gender expectations while at the same time experiencing a longing for freedom from these prescribed gender roles. In a young nation still developing, the legal system was still growing and transforming in order to reflect the cultural and religious values of America.⁴ So while British law provided the framework for the American legal system, Americans strove to create a legal system that would work in this new nation, whose political, religious, and economic systems were different from those of England.⁵ Therefore, the legal system in Early America in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was in constant flux, and this instability is reflected in the legalities surrounding unregulated mothers, such as criminal trials and government-sponsored methods of intervention, for instance early forms of social welfare.

⁴Jack P. Greene notes, “[Law] was central to what they thought about their place in time, the nature of the societies they were creating, and their identities of as agents of a culture that prided itself on its unique system of law and liberty” (260).

⁵ Christopher Tomlins discusses the morphing of European law to fit the circumstances of America, as well as the separate American jurisdictions that each adopted their own legal systems. See pages 11-13 in *The Many Legalities of Early America*.

In fact, Martha Albert Fineman argues in her book *The Neutered Mother, The Sexual Family* that single mothers and their children have long been subject to disadvantages. She states that in colonial New England, “a child considered *filius nullius* [the son of no one] did not have a domicile, since she or he was not tied to the father, and . . . was not considered part of the mother’s family either” (80). And as Ruth Wallis Herndon conveys in her book *Unwelcome Americans*, typically, when a woman of lesser means became pregnant out of wedlock in eighteenth-century America, two things happened within the community. First, her “hometown” was determined, for in early America, this was the community that had to bear the responsibility for the mother and the child, both in terms of finances, shelter, and medical care. Second, town officials endeavored to determine the identity of the father, and if, as was common, the woman refused to name him, town officials enlisted the help of the midwife, who was to prompt the mother for this information as she gave birth. These kinds of specific legalities affect the ways that society defines unregulated motherhood, and the texts this dissertation examines illustrates the way the legal system maneuvered to deal with issues such as the laws surrounding fornication, infanticide, paternal responsibility, and the status of the children of unwed mothers.⁶

The constant flux of the law is indicative of the anxiety that these mothers caused the patriarchal authority. Ulrich, in *A Midwife’s Tale*, explains that the legal position of unwed mothers in early New England was in constant transition. While sexual intercourse between an unmarried couple had always been illegal, Ulrich notes “in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, courts had punished men who fathered

⁶ See, for example, Karlsen, page 202 and Godbeer, pages 255-257 and 301-302;.

children out of wedlock as rigorously as the women concerned...but by the middle of the eighteenth century, most historians argue, fornication had become a woman's crime" (148).⁷ That women's role in an unwed pregnancy is more apparent is clear, for women bear the physical signs of pregnancy. But the fact that women virtually became isolated in their culpability reflects the evolutionary changes in gender roles during this time period.

As the dissertation moves from the seventeenth century to the eighteenth century, we can see through the texts this legal instability at play with the law in early America seemingly evolving on a nearly case-by-case basis. But also detectable, and I would argue more relevant, is the influence of religion upon these laws as well, with local ministers displaying an immense amount of power over the regulations surrounding these women, which can also be tracked by studying the texts in this dissertation. In fact, a clear pattern becomes apparent, with the power of the ministers strongest in the seventeenth century and then gradually declining as the dissertation moves into the eighteenth century. Examining unregulated motherhood is one way to explore this ministerial presence in the lives of women and the cultural attitudes toward these women, as well as their influence upon gender ideologies because unregulated mothers often occupy a liminal space within their society. In some respects, they might serve as symbols of women's freedom and choice, but on the other hand, they can represent the changing patterns of the American family as well as the patterns of prescribed gender roles. They are at once both progressive and threatening to any given society.

⁷See also William Nelson, *Americanization of the Common Law*; Cornelia Hughes Dayton, *Women Before the Bar: Gender, Law, and Society in Connecticut*; and Cathy Davidson, *Revolution and the Word*.

One central element to this dissertation, then, is an interrogation of the ways that these texts choose to deal with illegitimacy in its many forms. For example, even the Puritan poet Anne Bradstreet, who writes repeatedly of her love for her husband, children, and grandchildren, uses the issue of illegitimacy to reveal her ambiguous relationship to her poetic progeny in her poem, “The Author to Her Book” when she likens her book of poetry to an illegitimate child. She states, “If for thy Father askt, say, thou hadst none:/And for thy Mother, she alas is poor,/Which caus’d her thus to send thee out of door” (viii). At this moment, Bradstreet textually embodies the figure of the single mother, metaphorically highlighting illegitimacy to convey feelings of modesty in the publication of her poetry. Anne Bradstreet, who is the paragon of Puritan America in many ways, pulls on the trope of illegitimacy in her poetry. Even though she, by most accounts, would be the ideal vision of what a woman and mother “should be,” according to tradition, she still steps beyond her established boundaries and seems to feel the need to explain her choice. The publicness of her act requires that she step into this role of author carefully, as her authorship could make her socially “deviant.” And interestingly, Bradstreet does to herself what is forced onto women like Anne Hutchinson, as I discuss in my first chapter. It is much the same with other texts featuring unregulated mothers: textually, the women both embody and challenge societal notions of illegitimacy and attempt to redefine or revise what is considered “normal.”⁸ Much like Fredric Jameson suggests, the narratives, the stories present within these texts, are best understood as they

⁸ Michelle Burnham makes a similar argument in her book *Folded Selves*, in which she examines the rhetoric of dissent in Early New England in relation to economic systems of trade, credit, and investment.

relate to cultural norms outside of the text, such as the gradual slippage of ministerial control that takes place over the course of the dissertation.

Ultimately, these texts interrogate the possibilities of whether a place in society exists for these kinds of women. Scholars like Cathy N. Davidson argue that these texts do much cultural work, as well, particularly in regard to exhibiting the restraints that prescribed gender roles placed upon women.⁹ For example, Davidson argues that in novels like Hannah W. Foster's *The Coquette* (1797), while many "socially conservative" readers may have read the novel as one that emphasizes the consequences of sinful or unregulated behavior, readers also gain insight into the social and political climate of an eighteenth-century woman's world, a world in which choices were few and not always pleasant, a world in which marriage was crucial to social survival (and in some cases even for shelter and sustenance), and a world in which "fundamental injustices of patriarchal culture" must be confronted on a daily basis. As the dissertation moves from the seventeenth century to nineteenth century, the civil and religious "laws" which affected women (property, family, social norms) somewhat shift. Therefore, examining unregulated motherhood as these changes occur helps provide insight into the inequality that women endured, as the cultural attitudes toward these women also shifted to accommodate these changes, from the very first woman examined in this dissertation (Anne Hutchinson) to the last, a fictional one (Hester Prynne).¹⁰ Even though Hutchinson is an actual woman, whereas Hester Prynne is fictional, they share many traits, the least

⁹ See also Michelle Burnham's *Captivity and Sentiment*, in which she explores, among other factors, motherhood in relation to different contexts of captivity.

¹⁰ This dissertation, in fact, works to support Nathaniel Hawthorne's comparison's of the two in *The Scarlet Letter*, and in fact, Hutchinson could have been an inspiration for Hawthorne's famous character.

of which centers around the fact that each woman refused to submit to a rigid patriarchal authority system in place that aggressively challenged their actions and decisions. It is not just an accident that Hester is fictional; Hawthorne studied Puritan history in order to challenge conventional patriarchy, but in many ways, he helps to establish the full circle of patriarchal containment, with his text embodying the nineteenth-century representation of patriarchal containment in many ways.

The dissertation is divided into four chapters that discuss specific representations of illegitimacy. The texts that appear in these remaining chapters cover a wide array of genres, including historical documents, novels, and narratives, yet those studied possess a commonality in that they all feature women whose parental status and perceived unregulated choices structure the text. Furthermore, whereas single women dominate this dissertation, married women whose social illegitimacy collided with their motherhood, such as Anne Hutchinson and Mary Dyer, are also included so that the dissertation can examine unconventional motherhood on many levels, not just that of single motherhood. In many ways, while the marital status of women mattered in terms of the social scrutiny that these mothers endured, ultimately, irregular behaviors, whether from a married mother or single mother, take precedence over the other factors. The dissertation, in its final chapter, moves into the nineteenth century so as to further analyze the changing cultural landscape and how these changes affect untraditional or unregulated, illegitimate mothering.

Anne Hutchinson is the primary focus of Chapter One, with Mary Dyer figuring into the chapter as well. Although married, Hutchinson was accused of giving birth to a “monstrous” child by John Winthrop in his *Journal*, who suggests a connection between Hutchinson’s theological disagreements with prominent Bostonian ministers and her illegitimacy as a mother. During the Antinomian Controversy (1636-1638), Hutchinson was put on trial by both civil and religious authorities, and the birth of her child in many ways substantiated the accusations of her critics. Examining the trial transcripts and Winthrop’s *Journal* gives tremendous insight into the ministerial control dominant in the seventeenth century. Although all of the texts related to Hutchinson’s trials are heavily mediated, the remarkable rhetorical act of Hutchinson, coupled with the verbal exchanges with Winthrop and others during her trials, speaks volumes about the ways that women were expected to act and what happened when they stepped outside these expectations. Her use of language (rhetoric) tells her story. Even heavily mediated, these trials offer us an entrance into one woman’s spiritual and intellectual perspective and illustrate the consequences of breaking laws that were not specifically in the code but were rather laws of convention and tradition.

It is interesting to note, here, that Hutchinson and her contemporary Anne Bradstreet were quite similar, with both women breaking an unspoken code of tradition, with Hutchinson preaching and Bradstreet writing and publishing poetry—both acts that were situated squarely within man’s domain. Both women were married and were well-respected in their communities. Both women were mothers, and both women belonged to the same comfortable social class. The two women were so similar but were managed so differently, with Bradstreet celebrated and Hutchinson villainized. Perhaps one answer

can be found in the modest, apologetic approach that Bradstreet seemed to take upon the publication of her poetry. On the other hand, Hutchinson was anything but apologetic regarding her activities but was rather outspokenly defiant. Bradstreet's behavior might be defined as traditionally feminine, whereas Hutchinson's behavior might be categorized as more masculine.¹¹

But perhaps most crucial to this dissertation is the fact that she, along with Mary Dyer, a close friend of Hutchinson and fellow antinomian, are perhaps most known for their "monstrous" births, with Dyer's in 1637 and Hutchinson's in 1638. Each birth is described in detail by Winthrop and other prominent men, and they both serve as reminders of the connection between women's bodies and women's public acts. There is a clear correlation between "monstrosity" and female illegitimacy in men's stories about these women. Even further, the experiences of these "monstrous" women serve as a backdrop, even the early first phase, to the violence found in the Salem Witch Trials just a few decades later, with suggestions of witchcraft and the Devil already being made by the Puritan authority.

Moving into another context in which illegitimacy deals with law, "Murdering Mothers," Chapter Two, focuses on the early eighteenth century and a very different set of interactions between women, motherhood, and the legal system. The chapter centers upon those women who were accused of murdering their children, with particular focus on Rebekah Chamblit. Whereas Hutchinson's crime is "rhetorical" and "intellectual" in many ways, Chamblit's crime is physical, tangible. And whereas Hutchinson's

¹¹ Even though Anne Bradstreet is in fact the anti-Anne Hutchinson, she reinforces John Winthrop's argument against Hutchinson, which is explored in Chapter One: she is so intelligent that the "children" she produces are illegitimate.

“monstrous” birth was tragic in every sense of the word, Chamblit’s birth was tragic for other reasons. In this chapter, the oft-published “dying warnings” or “confessions” reveal the complexities inherent in these kinds of documents, for guilt, seduction, sin, and more establish the tone for these infanticide narratives. At the same time as in Chapter One, the narratives in Chapter Two are also heavily mediated, for the women often dictate their stories to clergyman or publishers, who write the texts. Therefore, these texts are encoded, which in turn provides much rhetorical interest.

“The Declaration, Dying Warning, and Advice of Rebekah Chamblit” (1733) is the primary narrative in this chapter. Chamblit’s narrative features a single woman who finds herself pregnant out of wedlock. Most likely published in Boston newspapers in 1733, this true narrative relates the story of Chamblit, who is imprisoned and sentenced to death for infanticide. In this particular account, Chamblit is dictating her final thoughts about her crime to a popular publisher of infanticide narratives, who makes sure that Chamblit’s words were “carefully taken from her own Mouth” while she was in prison. Her narrative is full of subtle accusations and proclamations of her innocence, which makes her text a significant, albeit complex, addition to any discussion of legitimacy, guilt, rhetoric, and motherhood.

The sermon by Thomas Foxcroft which deals with Chamblit’s crime and which was published alongside her narrative is juxtaposed against the narrative in the chapter. Cotton Mather and other ministers figure into the Chapter Two as well, with diary excerpts, execution sermons, and criminal narratives written by these men accompanying the infanticide narratives. These texts help demonstrate the stronghold ministers held over the public perception, as well as law, with regards to the experiences of women like

Chamblit. But they also demonstrate, as well, the fact that the immense power ministers had enjoyed for decades was beginning to weaken. Texts such as Mather's *Pillars of Salt* (1706) illustrate the attempt of ministers to maintain control over an increasingly "worldly" society that does not see religion as the only way to interrogate and understand the things that occur in their daily lives. Coupling these texts with the infanticide narratives highlights the power struggle between these two factions. In addition, *Patience Boston* and *Esther Rodgers* further illustrate the various contexts of infanticide, for while *Rodgers's* narrative and circumstances in many ways mirrors that of *Chamblit*, *Boston's* narrative is different, in that she is a married woman. Despite their different marital status, both women are rendered illegitimate mothers through the murder of their children, which defies social norms both in the colonial period and today.

At this point in the dissertation, a shift occurs between the rhetorical features of nonfictional texts and fictional representations. The dissertation has thus far looked at court documents, law, and narratives; fiction, at this point, is a logical point of inquiry. By the late eighteenth-century, fiction in early America began to take cues from the social impulse of a young nation. Particularly, the novels treated in this dissertation explore themes related to women and gender norms and expectations, for fiction is one opportunity to examine and explore these ideas.¹² Chapter Three moves later into the eighteenth century and looks at two novels in which women were censured and/or punished for having children out-of-wedlock. And whereas the "real" *Sally Pierce*, who

¹²Judith Sargent Murray, in "On the Equality of the Sexes (written in 1779, published in 1790)," advocated for women's knowledge and education for their empowerment in the new Republic. This influential treatise certainly encouraged women to scrutinize their place in their society. And even as some novels hearken back to early eighteenth-century didacticism, they nonetheless are one medium in which the many complexities of a major cultural shift in thinking about women are played out.

became pregnant out-of-wedlock, begins this chapter, the chapter in fact focuses on two fictional representations of women in Pierce's situation.

In eighteenth-century America, there were two "best-selling" novels that feature women who become pregnant as single women. Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*, published in 1794, tells the story of Charlotte, a teenage girl who travels to America with the rogue Montraville, only to be abandoned penniless and pregnant with his child. Similarly, Hannah W. Foster's *The Coquette* (1797) follows the story of Eliza Wharton, who, after spurring the advances of the suitable Reverend Boyer and encouraging those of the questionable Major Sanford, finds herself pregnant with the already-married Sanford's child. While Rowson's tale is completely fictional, it was often taken as fact, whereas Foster's novel is based upon the true story of Elizabeth Whitman, a poet whose tragic circumstances were widely known across early America. Both women meet identical fates in the end, though their children's fates are different, and through both novels, illegitimate motherhood is explored through the related themes of friendship, parental love, filial duty, poverty, sexuality, and isolation.¹³

Informed by English novels such as, Eliza Haywood's *Rash Resolve* (1725), both of these texts are didactic in tone and in many ways function as "warning" sermons to other young women, interestingly much like the infanticide sermons do. However, they also give readers access to a unique, and still mostly untold story of women in early America, conveying issues of women's sexuality, class roles, gender roles, and

¹³ Notable is the fact that these two characters enjoy a comfortable social class, which may serve to "protect" them to some degree from the judgment of readers. On the other hand, Rebekah Chamblit's social class is seemingly erased. Readers of her narrative may guess that she came from a low social standing, however, which suggests that there could in fact be something "illegitimate" about a lower social class.

conceptions of marriage and motherhood. For example, Davidson, in *Revolution and the Word*, argues that these novels “affirm both the need to educate women and the uselessness of any such education in a society that has no place for educated women” (186). These novels also demonstrate a different control other than that of ministers, for while the unregulated mothers still face death as punishment, a new kind of sympathy for their experience is found in these novels.¹⁴ Ministers have little say in the lives of these young women; rather, the control lies with the way that society reacts to them and treats them, as well as the individual choices that the women make. Therefore, the gradual slippage of ministerial control culminates in this chapter of the dissertation. In Chapter One, the control permeates the life of Hutchinson; in Chapter Two, the control plays a part, but some desperation can be detected in the ministers; and by Chapter Three, the ministerial presence is virtually negated altogether. This leads the dissertation to Chapter Four, which demonstrates how nineteenth-century revisions of Puritan history transform the ministerial role altogether.

Finally, the dissertation considers nineteenth century reappropriations of earlier narratives of illegitimate motherhood, when an increasing political awareness of the place of women in society changed the nature of unregulated mothering. These nineteenth century revisions of illegitimacy and motherhood reveal the immense cultural shift that began in the late eighteenth century and continued through much of that century and beyond. In these early nineteenth-century depictions, the increased options made available to women allowed them more agency, and, as Stephanie Coontz states,

¹⁴ One striking difference between the characters in the novel and Rebekah Chamblit might be social class. Whereas the characters in the novel enjoy a comfortable social class, Chamblit’s class is seemingly erased, but all signs point to the fact that she was likely from a lower social class.

“although considerations of status and practical necessity still compelled most people to marry, courtship and marriage increasingly became an individual decision made independently of family and community pressures” (2). The dissertation’s final chapter thus looks at two nineteenth-century texts by two extremely prominent authors: the first, Lydia Maria Child’s novel *Hobomok* and the second, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s seminal, novel *The Scarlet Letter*.

Child’s and Hawthorne’s novels illustrate the resurgence of interest in Puritan America, as made evident in several historical novels published during the century, including *The Scarlet Letter* and *Hobomok*. In choosing to set their stories in colonial New England, these authors place a nineteenth-century perspective upon the culture and tell a new version of Puritan America. These texts, perhaps more than any others, highlight the tensions between family values and the emerging individualism present in late-eighteenth and early nineteenth-century America.¹⁵ Using unregulated mothers, though each unregulated in her own way, both novels draw on Puritan beliefs and values to promote reflection and change. If nineteenth-century women still struggled with issues of equality, sexuality, and so forth, then what better system to examine than the very one from which most of these obstacles stem. Highlighting Puritan tenets, and then constructing unregulated female protagonists to challenge those tenets, both novels make strong arguments for a reconsideration of gender norms, using motherhood as a catalyst for this revision. Both women bear children from unconventional relationships, and the chapter argues it is through their status as mothers that they are able to deflect some of the patriarchal forces that dominate their lives.

¹⁵ See Stephanie Smith, Nancy F. Sweet, and Carolyn Karcher.

As Sharon M. Harris has noted, “Dissent in early American studies, with a few notable exceptions, has typically been rendered as a male venue in the altering political atmosphere of the Revolutionary period” (*Executing Race* 23). This dissertation, however, hopes to contribute to the quickly expanding scholarship that argues that women hold an equally important place in this context. Dissent, as a concept, was very much something that women participated in either purposely or incidentally, and in doing so, they did impact their society, particularly the notions about traditional patriarchal authority and the established gender expectations. Therefore, the agency that these mothers practice might be considered as an early stepping stone for women’s political voice later.

In response to the shifting gender ideologies from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, the patriarchal system imposed further regulation upon women, particularly in terms of their sexuality, their “place” in society, and their intellect. Motherhood, because it was perhaps the only aspect of early American society that men did not completely control all of the time, is one context in which regulation could only go so far, and the impact that these mothers had upon gender norms and expectations is central to the development of the overall social construction of the new nation. Ultimately, motherhood is intricately connected to gender ideologies. It is perhaps the only space in which patriarchal influence has always been on the outside looking in, where no matter how hard it tries, complete, absolute control is nearly impossible; it both contains and does not contain at times. Certainly motherhood has been (and still continues to be, to some degree) subject to the traditions, values, custom, and “law” long established by hegemony.

Dorothy E. Roberts has argued, “First, motherhood extinguishes women's individual identities, and second, motherhood leaves women vulnerable to patriarchal power...Together, these aspects of motherhood constitute the essence of oppression -- the denial of a person's ability to define herself and to determine the course of her own destiny” (102). However, this dissertation seeks to view motherhood from a different perspective, a perspective that allows resistance and change to shift pervasive and potentially destructive traditional gender ideologies linked to the maternal.

CHAPTER ONE

ANNE HUTCHINSON AND THE RHETORIC OF “MONSTROUS MOTHERHOOD”

Anne Hutchinson, who was considered by many of her contemporaries to be a loving mother, a devoted wife, and a gifted midwife, became an illegitimate mother through her defiance of Puritan New England’s gender roles. When women acted beyond the endorsed, expected role of women in this society, they could expect to be punished and used as an example to ward off others from these same mistakes. These examples of illegitimacy might vary among adultery, fornication cases, or even more severe criminal behaviors such as infanticide, which is discussed in the next chapter of this dissertation. Ministers used these behaviors as the subject of sermons and published pamphlets.¹⁶ Ministers also used these broadly defined cases of illegitimacy to strengthen their position of power and authority over women. If women were indeed found guilty of a heinous crime, then the ministers took on the immense responsibility to help guide them back to spiritual righteousness. Typically, ministers alone held this power; as such, their role, their perceived importance, and their very necessity to the society were reinforced whenever these situations of illegitimacy arose. It gave them an occasion to reaffirm their essentialness to their communities.

¹⁶ For example, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” by Jonathan Edwards (1741) is likely the most famous example.

Anne Hutchinson, however, does not fit in so neatly with the types of “illegitimacy” that ministers were accustomed to. In fact, her illegitimacy comes in the form of a direct challenge to the ministers; indirectly, her acts of defiance threaten not only the male hierarchal theocracy, but also women’s slim role in public Puritan society. In other words, Anne Hutchinson did not commit any kind of “crime,” so to speak, for which a law that she broke could be cited; in fact, her first words of the trial are a direct challenge regarding this distinction: “I am called here to answer before you but I hear no things laid to my charge.” Rather, the kinds of laws she broke were laws of convention, laws of unspoken conduct; indeed, Hutchinson stepped beyond what was considered “normal” and “legitimate” behavior for a woman. And when she did, the ministers were clearly taken aback, for the ways that they were accustomed to dealing with illegitimacy in many ways were not immediately accessible.

Therefore, Hutchinson was punished in ways that were both expected and unexpected. She was banished from Boston, a fairly unsurprising sentence, but she was also attacked at a very personal level as well, in ways that speak volumes about the fact that many empowered women were very quickly silenced in any way possible. If Hutchinson was admired for not only her intellectual ideas, which she seemed to be, but also for the fact that she was a devoted mother and wife and had much knowledge about birthing and women’s bodies during pregnancy, then the ministers found ways to damage Hutchinson’s credibility on all sides. Therefore, not only were Hutchinson’s ideas attacked, but the personal roles she held were attacked as well. As such, the very roles that women were “supposed” to have become points for Hutchinson’s adversaries to attack, and Hutchinson found herself in a position where her public acts of illegitimacy

suddenly became entwined with private details of her personal life. Moreover, Hutchinson's example serves as a strong reminder of the connection between women's bodies and women's intellect during this time.

In February of 1638, John Winthrop recorded, in detail, the birth of a child by a woman named Mary Dyer. Perhaps this birth would have gone unnoted by Winthrop, but for two significant details. First, and probably most importantly, Dyer was attended in birth by Anne Hutchinson. And second, the baby girl Dyer gave birth to was described as a "monster." Winthrop records the following in his *Journal*:

The wife of one William Dyer, a milliner in the New England exchange, a very fair and proper woman, and both of them notoriously infected with Mrs. Hutchinson's errors, and very censorious and troublesome, (she being a very proud spirit, and much addicted to revelations,) had been delivered of [a] child some few months before, October 17, and the child buried (being stillborn,) and viewed by none but Mrs. Hutchinson and the midwife, one Hawkin's wife, a rank familist also; and another woman had a glimpse of it, who, not being able to keep counsel, as the other two did, some rumor began to spread, that the child was a monster. (266)

That Winthrop takes care to link Hutchinson and her theological views here to the monstrous circumstances of the birth of Dyer's child is quite clear, as he begins his description by referring to William Dyer's respectable profession and characterizing Mary Dyer as "very fair and proper." His tone changes quite drastically, however, as he links the couple with Hutchinson. The medical rhetoric that he uses to bind the couple to

Hutchinson, “infected,”¹⁷ reveals the message of Winthrop here, indicating that Hutchinson is in some way connected to the very fact of this child’s “monstrosity.”¹⁸ His account of the birth is also recorded in his *A Short Story*, where he again refers to Mary Dyer as “very proper and comely young woman” (Hall 281)¹⁹ and again links the birth to Anne Hutchinson: “the manner of the discovery was very strange also, for it was that very day Mistris Hutchinson was cast of the Church for her monstrous errours, and notorious falsehood” (281).

An examination of the recent scholarship surrounding Anne Hutchinson reveals much about Hutchinson’s central role in the antinomian controversy. And while some scholarship does tend to minimize, perhaps, her dominance (Anne G. Myles notes that too many studies cast Hutchinson as a “self-contained figure;”²⁰ Philip F. Gura, for instance, stresses that Hutchinson is just one example of many who participated in orthodox disputes during this time period²¹), it remains that Hutchinson is indeed one of the most studied participants in the controversy.²² In fact, as Amy Schrager Lang

¹⁷ According to the OED, the oldest meaning of the word “infected” dates back to 1480—“infected with disease or infectious properties.” In 1570, another usage emerged—“evilly affected or contaminated in respect of moral character,” likely the usage that fits Winthrop’s meaning best. Either usage, however, is closely connected to “disease.”

¹⁸ Michelle Burnham notes that the Antinomian Controversy was characterized by Thomas Weld and others as “a menacing and seductive epidemic gone out of control” (*Folded Selves* 97).

¹⁹ Taken from David D. Hall, *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638*. All subsequent references from Winthrop’s *A Short Story* are taken from Hall, *A Short Story of the Rise, reign, and ruine of the Antinomians, Familists, & Libertines*, published in the aforementioned text.

²⁰ See Myles’s “From Monster to Martyr,” page 1.

²¹ See page 239 in Gura’s *A Glimpse of Sion’s Glory: Puritan Radicalism in New England, 1620-1660*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan UP, 1984.

²² For an examination of lesser known antinomian controversy participants, see Michael P. Winship’s *The Times and Trials of Anne Hutchinson; Puritans Divided*. Lawrence, Kansas: The University of Kansas Press, 2005.

observes, the study of Hutchinson has guided many academic treatments of the controversy, as well as the place of women in early seventeenth-century America. While historian Charles Francis Adams compiled many documents related to the Antinomian Controversy in 1894,²³ Edmund S. Morgan, in his 1937 article “The Case against Anne Hutchinson,” begins the scope of literary scholarship on Hutchinson with a brief summary and analysis of the primary accusations against her. Several decades then went by before Emery Battis published his historical treatment of the controversy, *Saints and Sectaries: Anne Hutchinson and the Antinomian Controversy in the Massachusetts Bay Colony* in 1962, which provides a historically dramatized and unsympathetic representation of Anne Hutchinson. However, after David D. Hall published his first edition of *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History* in 1968, which compiles, in their entirety, all the documents related to the controversy, scholarship began to flourish. As such, much has been written about her role in the feminization of the antinomian controversy, with scholars suggesting that the antinomian controversy was as much about gender politics as it was doctrinal debate.²⁴

While Hutchinson’s actions should be considered in the context of early seventeenth-century America, Hutchinson surely plays a significant role in defining seventeenth-century Puritan womanhood. Simply put, not many early American women

²³ *Antinomianism in the Colony of Massachusetts Bay, 1636-1638*. Boston: The Prince Society, 1894.

²⁴ See Michelle Burnham, who argues that Hutchinson’s danger is found in “a new articulation of selfhood” (*Folded Selves* 102) and Ann Kibbey, who asserts that because Hutchinson included herself in the religious conversation of the colony, something that was off limits to women, that she was deemed a threat (111). Others engaging in this dialogue include Amy Schragger Lang, Anne Jacobson Schutte, Lad Tobin, and Bryce Traister.

can be identified as “central” to any kind debate in the public sphere. However, the tendency to cast Hutchinson as only a “religious dissident” may be misleading, for she also certainly adhered to more traditional behaviors of Puritan womanhood as well. She was a mother, wife, and midwife, and to ignore these roles when considering Hutchinson blurs the complex role she maintained in her community. While the concept of the domestic sphere has received much scholarly attention in the study of women in early America, it does not apply to Hutchinson, for she occupies a space in which she belongs to both spheres but is not really firmly planted in either. Michelle Burnham notes that “Hutchinson maintained a disparity between the inner and outer self—a subject position consistent not only with her theological beliefs but with her linguistic practice” (*Folded Selves* 23). Indeed, the perception in this Puritan society was that women could not remain devoted mothers and wives while occupying roles reserved for men, leaving Hutchinson’s domestic, personal roles vulnerable to attacks if she were to choose to delve beyond her domestic responsibilities.²⁵

Another unique aspect to the study of Hutchinson is that her words are heavily mediated; nothing authored by Hutchinson herself is known to exist, so she is studied through legal documents, as well as contemporaries who discuss her. Nonetheless, Kathleen M. Brown argues that “it is possible to use traditional social history sources—court records, wills, letters, and diaries—and attend to discourse without losing sight of place, diversity, and women themselves” (115). Working alongside Brown’s ideology, the goal of this chapter is to contribute to the expanding feminist discourse in colonial American studies while at the same time showing how an interdisciplinary approach with

²⁵ For example, some of Hutchinson’s accusers assert that she has “stepped out of her place” as a wife and mother.

the aid of rhetorical and historical elements can strengthen the existing scholarship within the field of early American studies. Furthermore, Hutchinson's placement in the dissertation as a whole highlights the many ways that "legitimacy" is examined in Puritan society and the hierarchal reactions to perceived "illegitimacy." As such, the relationship between John Winthrop and Anne Hutchinson becomes crucial to this chapter so that the avenues of hierarchal, ministerial control over women's intellect and women's bodies in seventeenth-century Puritan America can be fully explored.

This chapter examines the maternal rhetoric that swirls around Hutchinson, as well as the aspects of her trial that pointedly relate to her status as a woman and her domestic life, or in other words, the more traditional roles that she maintained. The composition of Hutchinson's testimonies suggests a narrative structure that further places the intersection of gender in the private sphere and public sphere as a central concern, particularly considering the lingering attention Winthrop pays to Hutchinson's subsequent "monstrous birth" and her ties with that of Mary Dyer. Furthermore, Hutchinson's trials demonstrate the different ways Hutchinson and her male examiners interpret language, the distinction between public and private language, and gendered styles of discourse.

The trials also reveal the way that Hutchinson's more traditional roles (that as mother, wife) were in fact used against her to underscore her perceived unregulated actions. Finally, following the trials, the "monstrous" births of both Hutchinson and Mary Dyer were used as evidence to support the treatment and punishment of Hutchinson. If Winthrop could not control Hutchinson's intellectual capabilities and her willingness to interject her thoughts in the public sphere, he could make an attempt to control where and

how she voiced them, as well as the general public perception of her. It is for this reason that he uses the “monstrous” births. He believes that her mind is dangerous, but he instead locates that danger in her body. In this way, he exhibits a profound masculine control over Hutchinson’s body to subsidize his lack of control over her intellect.

When John Cotton moved to Boston in 1633 in order to avoid imprisonment for “nonconformity” in England, Anne Hutchinson and her family followed in 1634, for she “could not be at rest until she followed her beloved minister across the sea” (Hall 5). Additionally, she says in her civil trial that she was “much troubled to see the falseness of the constitution of the Church of England” (336),²⁶ so she clearly wanted to escape the religious confines of that country. Once her family settled in Boston, Hutchinson, while also working as a midwife, began to hold meetings in her home for women during which she “commented on the sermons not only of Cotton, but also of the other ministers who were preaching in nearby towns” (Hall 5).

Hutchinson’s religious gatherings soon became widely admired, and as David Hall states, “these meetings became so popular that she had to organize another series for men. In all, some sixty or more persons crowded into the Hutchinson home each week to hear Anne” (5). Indeed, in her civil trial, Hutchinson does admit that “Ey sir, I shall not equivocate, there is a meeting of men and women and there is a meeting only for women” (317). She did not only speak to women, then, but to men as well, thereby becoming

²⁶ Taken from David D. Hall, *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638*. All subsequent references from the trial by Hutchinson or the inquisitors are also taken from Hall, “The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson at the Court at Newtown” and “A Report of the Trial of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson before the Church in Boston,” both published in the aforementioned text.

guilty of speaking to a “promiscuous audience,” a move which does not break any official law but one which does challenge convention.²⁷ Hutchinson did not seek permission for these meetings, and certainly she could have never known that her sermons would become so highly regarded by her fellow townspeople; however, Hall points out that as more people gained interest, she added a session for men rather than limiting the meetings, indicating that she was pleased with her success.

In addition, she surely would have been aware that her sessions would not be well liked by the ministers in the area with whom she was directly disagreeing. As Lang notes, “As her following changed in both size and prestige, so too, apparently, did Hutchinson’s message. Rather than simply recapitulating the weekly sermon, she undertook to reproach the Massachusetts clergy” (67). Meanwhile, the Antinomian party increased in strength and number, and public protests occurred and petitions for their cause were presented, no doubt partly because of the influence of Hutchinson’s weekly meetings. Significantly, Hutchinson neither publicly demonstrated nor signed any petitions for the Antinomian cause (Hall 311) but rather stayed within the privacy of her home, perhaps sensing that she could be held accountable for these actions in the future. Indeed, in her civil trial, Hutchinson more than once points out that she did not break any law because she did not sign the petition: “But I had not my hand to the petition” (313). Hutchinson’s dissent, then, occurs within the private sphere, in her own home where she likely felt protection; however, given the fact that outsiders were brought into her home

²⁷ However, the Massachusetts General Assembly did publically “discourage” women from speaking to mixed audiences; still, Hutchinson was not breaking an official law.

to hear her preaching, Hutchinson's situation might be one in which the public and private spheres were not separate but merged.

Hutchinson's spiritual meetings are, in fact, why Hutchinson was ultimately brought to civil and religious trial, beginning in 1637. Her civil trial was conducted in Newtown (now Cambridge) over November 7-8, 1637, and the trial was presided over by Governor John Winthrop and other magistrates of Massachusetts. Her religious trial took place on March 22, 1638, in Boston, and it was presided over by John Wilson and the ministers of the Boston Church. There were no juries in either trial, and ultimately, Anne Hutchinson was found guilty in both. She was banished from the colony she called home and excommunicated from the Church of Boston (Frost-Knappman and Cullen-DuPont 3).

Both transcripts of Anne Hutchinson's two trials exist today in their entirety, and her testimony is the only way her voice can now be heard.²⁸ In her civil trial, Hutchinson performed well; she knew that she faced possible banishment or worse, so she was well prepared to defend herself against something that she did not even think to be unlawful. In her trial, she showed intelligence and reason, and she spoke carefully and accurately. She had no lawyer, and although upwards of eighteen men questioned her during the course of her trial, she remained steadfast in her position, even though it appears Hutchinson was the only woman present in the room. Often, Hutchinson proceeded to cross-examine her prosecutors, demanding answers in return from the men who questioned her. This aggressiveness, atypical of a woman during this time, may be why many of her male accusers found her so "dangerous." When one of the men proceeded to

²⁸No known written text by Hutchinson exists.

quote the Bible to support his own argument, she would in return quote the Bible to discredit the attempted statement. Indeed, Anne Hutchinson knew the Bible as well as (if not better than) her accusers. One accuser, Thomas Shephard, states that Hutchinson was “likely with her fluent Tongue and forwardness in expression to seduce and draw away many, Especially simple Women of her owne sex” (365).

Hutchinson did not speak as much in her religious trial as she did in her civil trial, which can probably be attributed to the fact that she herself says that she feels “weak” and is afraid that she will not be able to remember things she wants to say: “I desire to speake one word befor you proceed: I would forbar but by Reason of my Weakness. I fear I shall not remember it whan you have done” (372). Some scholars even speculate that Hutchinson was many months pregnant during this trial, which may have contributed to her physical weakness; if she indeed was pregnant, her condition was certainly noticed by her examiners, for “when a woman is pregnant...[she] is at no other time so distinctly marked ‘feminine’ and thus capable of eliciting highly gendered responses from audiences” (Buchanan 106). Regardless of Hutchinson’s physical state the one day that her religious trial lasted, she participated to the fullest extent that she was capable. She again demonstrated an impressive knowledge of the scriptures, and she combined this knowledge with her carefully stylistic, argumentative, and sharp rhetoric. In fact, According to legal theorists Richard Reike and Randall Stutman, “testimony is more than a series of probative statements . . .it is shaped by the language and style witnesses use to communicate” (154). As such, Hutchinson’s trials certainly demand attention today. Given her remarkable rhetoric, it seems fitting that Hutchinson’s testimony has been

referenced repeatedly in the scholarship that focuses on “regendering” the history of the rhetoric of colonial America.

Before focusing on the rhetoric of Hutchinson’s testimony, a description of her audience, her “judges” should be taken into account. First, Hutchinson’s audience is one that is entirely male, which makes her at once both an object and Other.²⁹ Next, all of the men in her trials are men of high social standing in the town, as only town or church officials were allowed to participate in the trials, while Hutchinson holds, of course, no official office in the community. This fact gives her audience a sense of power and security in which Hutchinson cannot immediately share.³⁰ In essence, because her audience more than likely holds the belief that they embody the highest standard of proper societal actions, Hutchinson is put at a disadvantage because she in fact is contesting that belief. Her unique position gives rise to obstacles that Hutchinson must overcome concerning her audience, which makes her rhetorical strategy even more crucial to her survival, while also making her rhetorical acts even more intricate.

Karlyn Kohrs Campbell explains in volume one of her book *Man Cannot Speak For Her* that historically, women were taught to be silent in matters of public opinion and to heed Aristotle’s opinion that “silence is woman’s glory” (1). Anne Hutchinson, however, did not adhere to this belief, for her lack of silence is the reason for her persecution. She continued to speak in her trial as well, as she did not have any legal

²⁹ Simone de Beauvoir develops this term in her influential *The Second Sex*. While the term can take many meanings, essentially here it refers to the fact that Hutchinson is viewed by gender only, or simplified to an “object.”

³⁰ Lorraine Code indicates that “systematic excisions of ‘otherness’ attest to a presumed—and willed—belief in the stability of a social order that the presumpers have good reasons to believe that they can ensure, because they occupy the positions that determine the norms of conduct and inquiry” (31).

representation and knew that her future standing in the community rested solely in her persuasive powers. Thus, in her first trial in the Court of Newtown, with an audience of eighteen men serving as her judges, including Governor John Winthrop and other town representatives, she dominates the trial immediately, as her very first words in the trial demonstrate:

Hutchinson: I am called here to answer before you but I hear no things laid to my charge.

Winthrop: I have told you some already and more I can tell you.

Hutchinson: Name one, sir.

Winthrop: Have I not named some already?

Hutchinson: What have I said or done?

Winthrop: Why for your doings, this you did harbour and countenance those that are parties in this faction that you have heard.

Hutchinson: That's matter of conscience, Sir. (312)

Hutchinson clearly decides from the very beginning of her trial that the men, her inquisitors, do not intimidate her. (Or if she is intimidated, she has decided not to show it.) On the contrary, she is doing the reverse—she is trying to intimidate Winthrop by demanding of him the claims against her. In this way, she begins the trial well; she responds skillfully to the obstacle of being a lone woman interrogated by several men, and the impression she gives is favorable—strong, assertive, and reasonable. She insinuates that she has done her part by responding to her summons but that the Court has been remiss and not done its part by neglecting to clearly explain their accusations. It is at the very beginning of the trial, then, that Hutchinson uses a strategy that she will repeat

throughout the trial: questioning what the men believe to be basic fact and “defying easy analysis” (Tobin 264).

In an effort to rebalance the power structure, Hutchinson also uses a pointed question in this passage as well to attempt to persuade her audience. When she asks, “What have I said or done,” she knows she will not get an answer, but in effect, asking the question not only puts pressure on Winthrop but also releases herself from the role of accuser. Clearly, Hutchinson begins with a forceful rhetorical strategy and with an apparent sense of aim in her rhetoric, which suggests that she did, indeed, have a rhetorical strategy. With Hutchinson speaking in an authoritative, powerful manner, she digresses from what may be considered typical of women’s language, which some linguists have described as “discourse of the powerless.”³¹ Moreover, Hutchinson is always respectful with her use of “sir”; in an appeal to ethos within her rhetorical act, she gives Winthrop the respect of this title and directly addresses him, thus adding to her credibility, while he does not return this consideration. When considering Hutchinson’s first statement, “I hear no things laid to my charge,” it becomes imperative to examine Winthrop’s opening comments in the trial as well, spoken before those of Hutchinson:

Winthrop: Mrs. Hutchinson, you are called here as one of those that have troubled the peace of the commonwealth and the churches here; you are known to be a woman that hath a great share in the promoting and divulging of those opinions that are the cause of this trouble, and to be

³¹ For example, Cheris Kramarae in “Proprietors of Language” argues that women’s and men’s language is distinct, with women’s language categorized as “polite, emotional, gossipy, and uncertain” and men’s language described as “capable, direct, and strong” (58). See also Susan S. Lanser, “Toward a Feminist Narratology” and Robin Lakoff, in *Language and Woman’s Place* for more regarding women’s language.

nearly joined not only in affinity and affection with some of those the court had taken notice of and passed censure upon, but you have spoken divers things, as we have been informed, very prejudicial to the honor of the churches and ministers thereof, and you have maintained meeting and an assembly in your house that hath been condemned by the general assembly as a thing not tolerable or comely in the sight of God nor fitting for your sex... (312).

Winthrop, contrary to what Hutchinson believes, has been clear regarding his claims about her. He says that she is in faction with other dissidents that have already received censure from the court; she is disrupting the peace; she is dishonoring the ministers and their churches in meetings maintained in her home; and finally, she is behaving in a way not fitting for her sex. Thus, when Hutchinson tells Winthrop to name “one” offense, he had just named at least four, indicating that Hutchinson does not observe any of these actions to be something she should be on trial for. Hutchinson does not deny these claims against her; rather, she insinuates that nothing is wrong with them in her response, and she understands that she has broken no official law, only that of convention and societal expectation.³²

Hutchinson proceeds to demand concise answers from her inquisitors and continually puts them in the unexpected position to answer to her ultimatums:

Hutchinson: I pray Sir prove it that I said they preached nothing but a covenant of works.

³² Many scholars, including Michelle Burnham, Phillip Gura, and Andrew Delbanco, note that Hutchinson’s theological views were not that inconsistent with Puritan theology. In fact, Gura states the differences were “only a matter of degree” (258).

Thomas Dudley: Nothing but a covenant of works, why a Jesuit may preach truth sometimes.

Hutchinson: Did I ever say they preached a covenant of works then?

Dudley: If they do not preach a covenant of grace clearly, then they preach a covenant of works.

Hutchinson: No Sir, one may preach a covenant of grace more clearly than another, so I said.

Dudley: We are not upon that now but upon position.

Hutchinson: Prove this then Sir that you say I said. (318)

“Prove it!” she demands. She again puts her examiners to task, letting nothing they say escape her scrutiny.³³ Working within this aspect of ethos, Hutchinson’s rhetoric in this instance can easily be classified as an appeal to ethos. Her forcefulness in refusing to allow Dudley to escape his confusion is impressive and bold. She remains respectful yet firm, and she will not allow the man examining her to continue on to another point until she is satisfied that her present argument is understood. Furthermore, apparently recognizing that Dudley is attempting to entrap her with an either/or situation, she does not allow him to advance his fallacy, and she again clarifies her answer with “one may preach a covenant of grace more clearly than another.” Tobin argues, Hutchinson “makes it clear that, for her, words and the concepts they signify are not identical. Throughout the trial she seeks to undercut surface meaning, to challenge the minister’s fixed interpretations, and to point out that meaning lies at least as much in decoding as

³³ In her discussion on dynamism and appeal to ethos, Kohrs Campbell states, “in some cases, the attitude toward the rhetor is affected by the degree to which he or she is empathetic, aggressive, forceful, bold, active, and energetic” (*Rhetorical Act* 135).

the encoding” (265). Hutchinson is cognizant of the fact that her actions have already been judged, so she takes care to question the assumptions of her inquisitors. In fact, her tone approaches ridicule when she asks Dudley, “Did I ever say they preached a covenant of works then?” Indeed, Hutchinson’s persistent questions work to make the men look foolish, and the fact that Hutchinson attempts to reverse the role of prosecutor and defendant strongly suggests that Hutchinson did indeed approach the trial with a clear strategy.

Hutchinson continues to exhibit dominance and rhetorical skill in the trial, at some points becoming very argumentative with her examiners, replying to questions with questions of her own:

Winthrop: All this I grant you, I grant you a time for it, but what is this to the purpose that you Mrs. Hutchinson must call a company together from their callings to come be taught by you?

Hutchinson: Will it please you to answer me this and to give me a rule for then I will willingly submit to any truth. If any come to my house to be instructed in the ways of God what rule have I to put them away?

Winthrop: But suppose that a hundred men come unto you to be instructed will you forbear to instruct them?

Hutchinson: As far as I conceive I cross a rule in it.

Winthrop: Very well and do you not so here?

Hutchinson: No Sir for my ground is they are men. (315)

This particular passage is very interesting because two things happen. First, Winthrop attempts to take the control Hutchinson has achieved during the trial away from her by

claiming not once but twice that he has “granted” her the opportunity to speak as much as she has thus far, when clearly if he had it his way, she would be speaking only to answer his and his fellow magistrates’ questions. In this sense, Winthrop demonstrates the phallogocentric ideologies of control and oppression.³⁴ He is actively attempting to oppress Hutchinson’s voice and keep her within a certain boundary.³⁵ Hutchinson is not fazed by this attempted assertion, however, and continues in an argumentative way, using the phrase “will it please you” as a prelude to her question. She is clearly beginning to become frustrated with Winthrop; she wants him to answer to her when it is supposed to be the other way around, thereby challenging his attempt to regain control and suppress her voice.

Secondly, in the above passage, Hutchinson demands from Winthrop a rule that forbids her actions in her meetings. But because Winthrop knows that there is no *official* rule prohibiting this act, he cannot attest to it. Therefore, he cannot produce a rule that incriminates Hutchinson. In asking for precedence, Hutchinson again disrupts the trial. She places the burden of proof on Winthrop, and in essence, gives him the responsibility to prove the intrinsic harm in her actions. The fact that Winthrop cannot deliver an adequate response to her requests weakens his and the other dissenters’ argument, as well as their credibility, considerably. In instances like these, Hutchinson very clearly attempts to subvert the power structure, adopting the masculine, rule-based language that Winthrop and others have practiced during the trial.

³⁴ Per Derrida, phallogocentric language is linked to the power structures inherent in the spoken word.

³⁵ See Minh-ha Trinh, “Of Other Peoples: Beyond the ‘Salvage’ Paradigm,” page 319.

In both her civil and religious trial, Hutchinson's extensive and impressive knowledge of scripture enables her to speak expertly and eloquently in her interpretations, as she calmly asks for the accusations to be explained.³⁶ For example, in the opening statements of her church trial, Hutchinson makes a distinction between public and private discourse:

But I desire of the Church to demand one Question. By what Rule of the Word whan these Elders shall come to me in private to desire Satisfacion in some points, and doe professe in the sight of God that thay did not come to Intrap nor insnare me, and now without speaking to me and expressing any Unsatisfaction would come and bringe it publicly unto the Church before thay privately delt with me? . . . I thinke it is a Breach of Church Rule, to bringe a Thing in publicke before thay have delt with me in private. (352-353)

Hutchinson refers here to the Biblical passage Mathew 18.15: "Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone" (Hall 349). Using the scripture as evidence, she again asks her accusers to name a rule that she has broken, and by using the Bible to support her own cause, she does not leave her examiners with much room to answer, for while they can disagree with her interpretation of the Bible, they surely cannot disagree with the Bible, which brings to mind Gura's aforementioned assertion that the differences were "a matter of degree" (258). Invoking

³⁶ In the days preceding a separation of church and state, ministers and town officials both had strong roles in civil trials. In fact, many crimes that fell before civil jurisdiction were ones that also broke religious laws as well, such as fornication charges. The line between civil and religious crimes could indeed become quite blurry in seventeenth-century America.

Biblical references gives Hutchinson authority that her inquisitors are forced to acknowledge. She also differentiates between private and public discourse, realizing that things that people say in private will differ from that said in public, particularly for Hutchinson, who clearly believed that her actions within her home should be considered differently than if she had spoken them in public, in church, for example.

Similarly, in her civil trial, Hutchinson states, “It is one thing for me to come before a public magistracy and there to speak what they would have me speak and another when a man comes to me in a way of friendship privately...there is difference in that” (319). She seems to subtly suggest here that the court expects her to say certain things and she understands this distinction. In other words, she knows when she should speak and when she should remain silent regarding certain points; in her differentiation between the public and the private, the silence requirement does not apply to her. Hutchinson, it seems, did in fact attempt to stay within certain conventional boundaries because her dissent stayed within the private sphere, the sphere in which Hutchinson felt she had control, authority, and protection. In turn, Winthrop seems frustrated with this strategy, stating, “It is well discerned to the court that Mrs. Hutchinson can tell when to speak and when to hold her tongue. Upon the answering of a question which we desire her to tell her thoughts of she desires to be pardoned” (319). Hence, for example, at those times when Hutchinson responds to a question with a question, she is making a clear choice to edit her public statements.

These instances are not the only times that Hutchinson makes reference to the distinction between different types of discourse. For example, on the second day of her Newtown trial, she asks the ministers to take an oath that what they are speaking in

public is the truth, for she states, “The ministers come in their own cause...though there be a sufficient number of witnesses yet they are not according to the word, therefore I desire they may speak upon oath” (327). Her desire here for the ministers to take an oath that their testimony is true outrages many of the men. For example, Increase Nowel argues that making the ministers take an oath may cause congregations to “undervalue the ministers” (328). Simon Bradstreet suggests that Hutchinson is trying to circumnavigate the “real” work of the proceedings with this desire, stating, “Mrs. Hutchinson, these are but circumstances and adjuncts to the cause” (327). John Endicot implies that Hutchinson’s request for an oath suggests that she has little respect for the words of the ministers (329). Thomas Shephard goes so far as to say that the only reason to take an oath is because of the “importunity” of Hutchinson (330). However, Hutchinson again has scripture on her side, as she states, “But it being the Lord’s ordinance that an oath should be the end of all strife, therefore they are to deliver what they do upon an oath” (327). But perhaps her real reason for requesting this oath comes just a few turns later when she states, “If they accuse me I desire it may be upon an oath” (327), which may be her way of reconciling the fact that after the first day of the trial, when she went home she looked over her notes and found discrepancies in some of the statements made: “I have since I went home perused some notes out of Mr. Wilson did then say and I find things not to be as hath alleged” (327). Thus she uses the oath in an attempt to receive a fair trial, as well as an attempt to make sure what she perceives as the “truth” is put forward.

Winthrop too spends time examining the public and private spheres. While it may be clear to some that Hutchinson is deviating from the expected behaviors of women in

the public realm, he also makes it a point to highlight how Hutchinson's actions may be affecting the domestic sphere as well. In fact, part of Winthrop's claims against Hutchinson's and the disapproval of her meetings centers upon the private sphere. Winthrop states, "Besides that the occasion which hath come of late hath come from none but such as have frequented your meetings, so that now they are flown off from magistrates and ministers since they have come to you. And besides that it will not well stand with the commonwealth that families should be neglected for so many neighbors and dames and so much time spent" (316). Indeed, Winthrop hopes to condemn Hutchinson in terms of her actions in both the private and public domains. Not only is she actively disagreeing with many ministers in town with her meetings, not only is she breaking traditional mores by holding meetings for men and women, she also is responsible for breaking down families in the community. How can the women who go to her meetings so frequently be properly caring for their homes and their children, Winthrop seems to ask. Evidently, he sees the inherent danger in this course of action. Similarly, in her church trial, the fact that Hutchinson has stepped beyond her duties as a woman in Puritan society is again emphasized, this time by the minister Hugh Peters. He states, speaking to Hutchinson, "I would comment this to your Consideration that you have stept out of your place, you have rather bine a Husband than a Wife and a preacher than a Hearer; and a Magistrate than a Subject" (383).

Winthrop and Peters seem to realize Hutchinson's actions may only be the beginning of dangerous trend. If women begin to take on more roles in the public sphere, if they begin to "neglect" their duties at home, then the very definition of family begins to adapt. What is acceptable and unacceptable for women could begin to change.

Therefore, they seem to believe, faulting the women in their domestic duties sends a strong message to them. If being good mothers, good homemakers are their “jobs,” so to speak, then women are surely jeopardizing their jobs by attending Hutchinson’s meetings so frequently. Moreover, since Hutchinson is the one organizing these meetings, then surely she is neglecting her duties at home, which include, among other responsibilities, mothering her children. Hutchinson does not seem to be moved or persuaded by this line of questioning, however, for she simply states in her Newtown trial to Winthrop, “Sir I do not believe that to be so...if you have a rule from God’s word you may [put it before her]” (316).

In fact, in both her trials Hutchinson repeatedly turns toward scripture for explanation and credibility, and she often asks the same of her judges, so much so that at one point Winthrop exclaims, “We are your judges, and not you ours” (316). Winthrop and the other men wanted her to admit to wrongdoing on her part. Hall states, “Those who prosecuted Mrs. Hutchinson hoped that she would confess her errors, as, for a moment, she did” (350). Indeed, in her church trial she does admit to error, but she then quickly adds a disclaimer onto her admission:

Hutchinson: I doe not acknowledge it to be an Error but a Mistake. I doe Acknowledge my Expression to be Ironious but my Judgment was not Ironious, for I held befor as you did but could not express it soe. John 12 [1] Corinthians 4.16.3 Things. That men whan thay believe have a New Body And thay have 2 bodies. 1 Corinthians 15.44.37. (361)

Hutchinson defends her “mistake” with a scripture that shows why she holds the beliefs that she does in an attempt to prove that her interpretations of the sermons of the

ministers are in line with the message of the Bible. She and the ministers interpret the Bible in different ways; she understands this discrepancy and admits to it, but the ministers will not.³⁷ She again realizes that language is not fixed and attempts to convey this belief to the ministers. For example, at one point in her church trial, Hutchinson, John Cotton, and John Davenport have a lively debate over the meaning of the word “body” in various scripture passages (361). Following tenets of moral relativism, she stresses again and again, in fact, that context is important to meaning as well, and she implies that she and the ministers do not possess the fullest capability to always interpret biblical meaning correctly.³⁸ Still, though, the fact that she can refute her accusations with scripture sends a strong message.

Hutchinson’s accusers, however, finally trap her toward the end of her trial at Newtown, as she dangerously admits to a divine revelation:

Nowell: How do you know that that was the spirit?

Hutchinson: How did Abraham know that it was God that bid him offer his son, being a breach of the sixth commandment?

Dudley: By an immediate voice.

Hutchinson: So to me by an immediate revelation.

Dudley: How! an immediate revelation.

Hutchinson: By the voice of his spirit to my soul. (337)

³⁷ See Patricia Caldwell’s “The Antinomian Language Controversy,” which gives a thorough treatment of the difference interpretations of language and biblical meaning during the controversy.

³⁸ Tobin states, “She [Hutchinson] argued...human understanding of God’s words is always limited and incomplete” (261).

It is evident that this admission is harmful for Hutchinson.³⁹ At this point in the trial, her examiners, sensing that they were not making ground in their accusations, began to combine against her, often giving her little opportunity to speak. Unfortunately, this admission proved costly, as the men reacted vehemently to her claim, viewing her with a mixture of fear and hatred.⁴⁰ In fact, one man, Stoughton, even exclaimed, “Behold I turn away from you” (338). Winthrop states that he is “persuaded that the revelation she brings forth is delusion” (343). Myles claims that this admission is a slippage in Hutchinson’s rhetoric. Whether she intended to share this information the entire time or whether she “slipped,” it is clear that she received a conditioned response by her audience.⁴¹ Rather than seriously considering Hutchinson’s statement, the men are immediately hostile to it because social norms (tradition) dictate that they do so. As such, they use it as the basis for her punishment.

Following her admission of an immediate revelation, Hutchinson is virtually silenced for the remainder of the Newtown trial. After hours upon hours of speaking every other turn, she is reduced to speaking only seven more turns out of the remaining one hundred turns of the trial. Ultimately, Hutchinson is excommunicated from the Church of Boston and banished from the community of Newtown. The words spoken by Winthrop in the Newtown court’s official ruling are quite telling. He states, “Mrs.

³⁹ For more on this admission, see Michael G. Ditmore’s “A Prophetess in Her Own Country: An Exegesis of Anne Hutchinson’s ‘Immediate Revelation.’” In this article, Ditmore discusses the consequences of the revelation, as well as more on the reaction of her accusers.

⁴⁰ Given the tardiness of this claim, Hutchinson’s original intentions may not have been to share this fact in court.

⁴¹ See Campbell, *The Rhetorical Act*, who discusses conditioned responses on page 104.

Hutchinson, the sentence of the court you hear is that you are banished from out of our jurisdiction as being a woman not fit for our society, and are to be imprisoned till the court shall send you away” (348). Her excommunication from the church is equally powerful; the Reverend John Wilson states:

Therefor in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ and in the name of the Church I doe not only pronounce you worthy to be cast out, but *I doe cast you out* and in the name of Christ *I doe deliver you up to Satan* that you may learne no more to blaspheme to seduce and to lye. And I doe account you from this time forth to be a Hethen... Therefor *I command you* in the name of Christ Jesus and of this Church *as a Leper to withdraw your selfe out of the Congregation.* (388)

She moves first to Rhode Island and then to upstate New York “apparently in providential vindication of her judges. Later, she and all but one member of her family were killed in an Indian [attack]” (Lang 198).⁴²

Hutchinson does not disappear from the historical record when she and her family were excommunicated, however. John Winthrop, in his *Journal History of New England* mentions Hutchinson repeatedly and not only details the proceedings of the her two trials but also provides periodic updates of her and her family over the years. In his *Journal*, Winthrop describes Hutchinson in various ways. In one passage, for example, he refers to

⁴² Hutchinson’s ten-year-old daughter Susanna was spared in the attack. See Williams, *Divine Rebel*, page 197. Hutchinson’s fate is ironic, as she disagreed with aggressive colonial action toward the Indians in the Pequot War and urged her male followers not to participate. See Cheryl C. Smith, “Out of Her Place: Anne Hutchinson and Dislocation of Power in New World Politics.” Ann Kibbey also links the antinomian controversy to the Pequot War in her book *The Interpretation of Material Shapes in Puritanism*. In particular, see chapter five, “1637: the Pequot War and the Antinomian Controversy.”

her as “a woman of bold spirit and ready wit” (195). But his comments about her mostly center on his analysis of the trials, as he looks for justification and “proof” that he and the other men involved in the trials were correct in their dealings with her. One such verification for Winthrop comes with her involvement in the “monstrous” birth of Mary Dyer. Another comes with her own “monstrous” birth shortly thereafter. Essentially, Winthrop proceeds to turn his anxiety about rhetoric into a physical bodily deformity that he “attacks” with language.

It is with these occurrences more than anything else that Winthrop seems to glean the most validation for the persecution of Hutchinson. He in fact uses the “monstrous” births as confirmation to dismiss her theological views, in effect entwining the female body with politics surrounding the controversy. It is here, then, that his comments in the official court ruling take on even more power. If he believes Hutchinson to be a woman “not fit for our society,” then it is natural for him to attack Hutchinson based upon other ways that she has “failed” as a woman. His preoccupation with her association with monstrous births proves that again in both the public and private spheres, Hutchinson has deviated from “normal” behaviors. In Hutchinson’s trial, some of the men associated Hutchinson with the devil.⁴³ While Winthrop never goes this far in her trial, he certainly insinuates as much in his *Journal* and in his *Short Story* when he speaks of the “monstrous” births.

However before moving into an examination of the discourse surrounding the births, a brief discussion of Mary Dyer is due to better explain her connection to Anne Hutchinson. While the details of her birth and background are unclear, she married John

⁴³ Increase Nowell states that Hutchinson is affected by “devilish delusion” (342) and Thomas Dudley states that she is “deluded by the devil” (343).

Dyer in 1633. Both Dyers were a part of an antinomian faction, and Mary Dyer has been “repeatedly identified as one of Hutchinson’s closest friends and followers” (Myles 1). This apparent closeness can be seen in the fact that Hutchinson and Dyer kept the circumstances of Dyer’s delivery a secret for several months before it was discovered, significantly on the day that Hutchinson was excommunicated with Dyer by her side.

However, Dyer is probably best known for defying the Massachusetts anti-Quaker laws set forth between 1656 and 1658 when she visited friends in Massachusetts not once, not twice, but three times; she was ultimately hanged in 1660 for her actions. The Massachusetts law, which stated that “any members of the cursed sect found within its jurisdiction shall be sentenced to banishment upon paine of Death” (Shurtleff 346), can be read, along with Dyer’s actions, against the sentence that Hutchinson was dealt. Dyer became a Quaker in at some point in the 1650’s. Dyer was first punished in Boston in 1657, where she was imprisoned and ultimately banished from Massachusetts, along with two other Quakers, William Robinson and Marmaduke Stephenson. When she was released, she went back to Rhode Island, but she returned to Boston in October of 1659 to visit an imprisoned friend and was again imprisoned. She was given a brief trial, but “in the face of [her] incorrigible return, was sentenced to death” (Myles 4). As she was prepared for execution, she received a dramatic, last-minute reprieve that was likely prearranged (Myles 4). She was returned to prison and banished again, ultimately returned to Rhode Island. But in 1660 she returned a third time, this time executed by hanging for her crime of entering Massachusetts as a Quaker.

Dyer, then, was banished again from the very place that Hutchinson was some twenty years earlier. And she both enters and leaves public record in the same location,

her entry documenting her “monstrous” birth and her exit chronicling her execution. Many similarities between the two situations can be highlighted beyond location, however, but one significant one can be found in the court records of Dyer’s 1660 trial. John Endicot, who was also involved in Hutchinson’s trial, asks a revealing question during one point in the court proceedings. Endicot asks Dyer if she is a prophet, and her reply is telling, stating that “she spake the words that the Lord spake in her; and now the thing is come to pass” (Burrough 28). Like Hutchinson twenty years before her, Dyer too, in front of a Boston court, discloses her divine revelation, but as a Quaker instead of a Puritan. And as Myles nicely states, “Although Puritan authorities remained publicly silent about the memories of Hutchinson these radical women [Quakers] must have evoked, her image was surely present for them in this nightmarish return of the repressed” (3). Undoubtedly, Dyer did indeed stir up recollections of Hutchinson and her “heretical” statements two decades earlier.⁴⁴

Certainly, it would have been nearly impossible for John Endicot not to recall the same line of questioning for both women, particularly since they had long ago been linked on the very day that Hutchinson was excommunicated. Their bond, however, rested not only in Dyer’s allegiance to Hutchinson’s antinomianism, for Hutchinson had many followers that were never mentioned in the public record, but more significantly, the ability of Hutchinson to be tied to Dyer’s “monstrous” birth, which in turn provided men like Winthrop with the opportunity to “prove” Hutchinson’s dangerousness, as well

⁴⁴ In fact, a letter written during this time by John Eliot recounts the monstrous birth, likely in an effort to further substantiate claims of heresy against her. See Johan Winsser, “Mary Dyer and the ‘Monster’ Story,” page 30.

as her theological errors. In fact, Winthrop, in his *Short Story*,⁴⁵ lingered upon the details of Dyer's birth, taking pains to describe every physical detail as if he had been there, because for him, it validated the actions taken against Hutchinson, as well as giving him the chance to connect Hutchinson, physically, to a treacherous, witch-like, monstrous presence.

Winthrop describes the circumstances of Dyer's delivery in his *Short Story*:⁴⁶

At Boston...upon the 17.day of October 1637 the wife of one William Dyer...was delivered of a large woman childe...stillborn...but so monstrous and misshapen, as the like hath scarce been heard of: it had no head but a face, which stood low upon the brest, as the eares (which were like an Apes) grew upon the shoulders. The eyes stood farre out, so did the mouth, the nose was hooking upward, the brest and back was full of sharp prickles, like a Thornback, the navel and all the belly with the distinction of the sex, were, where the lower part of the back and hips should have been, and those back parts were on the side the face stood. The arms and hands, with the thighs land legges, were as other childrens, but in stead of toes, it had upon each foot three claws, with talons like a young fowle...It had no forehead, but I the place thereof, above the eyes, foure hornes,

⁴⁵ Lindal Buchanan states of Winthrop's *Short Story*: "The document...exploited the maternal evidence and arguments to denigrate the antinomians and consolidate Puritan power" (251).

⁴⁶ In addition to Winthrop and Weld, other men who recorded the details of the monstrous births include John Wheelwright and Edward Johnson. In *Mercurius Americanus* (1645), Wheelwright takes exception to the way that Winthrop and Weld treat the births in Winthrop's *Short Story*. In Johnson's *Wonder-Working Providence of Sions Saviour in New England* (1653), he attributes the births to God's punishment for their association with the devil.

whereof two were above an inch long, hard, and sharpe, the other two were somewhat shorter. (280-281)⁴⁷

Winthrop indeed spares no detail regarding the physical condition of Dyer's stillborn child, and the rhetoric he uses to describe the child evokes images of monsters, beasts, and the devil.⁴⁸ Moreover, in his *Journal* he describes the Mary Dyer as "the wife of one William Dyer, a milliner in the New England exchange, a very fair and proper woman, and ... notoriously infected with Mrs. Hutchinson's errors" (266).⁴⁹ Dyer, described in the *Journal*, as here noted, as "very fair and proper" and described in the *Short Story* as "very proper and comely" certainly seems for Winthrop, on the outside, to be untainted and in fact, lovely. But inside her, he suggests, a contagion has formed, which can be directly linked to Hutchinson. If on the outside she is physically fair, on the inside she is anything but. Winthrop, with his medical imagery, indeed has linked the birth of this child to her dealings with Hutchinson, suggesting that it is her "misguided" infection with Hutchinson that has caused this "monstrous" birth.⁵⁰ In short, he subtly insinuates that the child's "monstrous" form was caused by her mother's erroneous thoughts and

⁴⁷ In one of the first studies of Anne Hutchinson, Emery Battis, in his book *Saints and Sectaries*, gives a dramatic, historically fictional account of Dyer's birth: "The last frightful scream tore from Mary's throat and she fell back, mercifully unconscious...a creature [was born] so horrible in its malformation as to bear only the slightest terrifying resemblance to mankind. It was most mercifully dead" (178).

⁴⁸ See Anne Jacobson Schutte, "'Such Monstrous Births': A Neglected Aspect of the Antinomian Controversy" for a nice discussion of the history of monsters from the late fifteenth century Europe through the time of Hutchinson and Dyer's monstrous births.

⁴⁹ Which makes Hutchinson a kind of proto-Quaker.

⁵⁰ Birthing metaphors are common during this time period. See Ben Barker-Benfield, "Anne Hutchinson and the Puritan Attitude toward Women."

actions.⁵¹ As Traister notes, “Anne Hutchinson’s religious dissent appears on the historian’s stage as a kind of biological contaminant, spreading disease just as surely as the female heretic gives birth to monsters” (141). Winthrop’s use of the word “infected” carries a kind of double meaning: she is at once spreading a source of evilness throughout the society.

Thomas Weld,⁵² in his Preface to Winthrop’s *Short Story* is perhaps even more direct in linking the birth to the mother’s flawed beliefs. As he discusses the punishments not only of Hutchinson but of various parties furthering the antinomian cause, he states:

Then God himself was pleased to step in with his casting voice, and bring in his owne vote and suffrage from heaven, by testifying his displeasure against the opinions and practices, as clearely as if he had pointed with his finger, in causing the two formenting women⁵³ in the time of the height of the Opinions to produce out of their wombs, as before they had out of their brains, such monstrous births as no Chronicle (I think) hardly ever recorded the like. Mistris Dier brought forth her birth of a woman childe, a fish, a beast, and a fowle, all woven together in one, and without an head.
(214)⁵⁴

⁵¹ See Lindal Buchanan, “A Study of Maternal Rhetoric,” for a discussion of the use of monsters in religious controversies.

⁵² Weld was one of Hutchinson’s examiners in both her trial at Newtown and the Church of Boston.

⁵³ Mary Dyer and Anne Hutchinson

⁵⁴ Schutte presents a case for the medical diagnosis of Dyer’s infant girl as an anencephalic (90n) that most scholars today accept as a valid diagnosis.

Weld, when he states, “produce out of their wombs...as they had out of their brains” he, like Winthrop (but more straightforwardly) associates the intellectual, spiritual beliefs of the women, which he believes to be wrong, with the births of their malformed children. In fact, he takes this assertion a step further and suggests that the stillbirths were a direct punishment from God for their heretical beliefs, “thus God’s anger, malformed children, and mothers’ beliefs are linked and work to dismiss the dissenters in aggregate” (Buchanan 252).

Of course, neither Weld nor Winthrop was present at the birth.⁵⁵ In fact, the circumstances of the birth were kept silent from town officials for five months. Dyer, Hutchinson, Mary Hawkins (another midwife) and an unnamed woman were supposedly the only people who actually witnessed the child, which highlights the fact that maternity shields the women from the patriarchal authority.⁵⁶ While Hutchinson remained silent, the other woman did not, and she told several in the community about Dyer’s child and rumors spread. Yet it was not until the day that Hutchinson was excommunicated from the church that town officials found out about this birth. According to Winthrop, as Hutchinson exited the assembly, Dyer was by her side. As people stood to watch, Dyer was identified by some in the crowd as “the woman who had the Monster” (281). This information eventually got to one of the Elders of the Church, who in turn questioned Hutchinson about it and eventually Hawkins. The fact that birth was kept from Winthrop

⁵⁵ Winthrop, however, did exhume and examine the child after discovering the secret. See Lindal Buchanan, “A Study of Maternal Rhetoric,” page 249, for more.

⁵⁶ Winthrop reports in his *Journal* that women consulted John Cotton regarding the birth, who encouraged the women to secretly bury the child in the woods because God meant for such things to be private. Cotton also kept this birth a secret from town officials. Later, however, he too subtly condemns Hutchinson in a sermon.

and other town officials is significant. As Bryce Traister notes, “while reproduction perpetuated (ideally) patriarchal social order, the moment of birth in fact suspended patriarchal authority. The colonial preoccupation with record-keeping directly speaks to this issue of male supervision, insofar as records of births...supplemented a gap in knowledge opened by the feminine mystery of childbirth” (141).⁵⁷ The fact that the birth was kept secret for several months from authorities represents a breach in the order of things and a limit, if just for a few months, of the power of the theocratical authority. It, in fact, highlights the traditional male exclusion from the birthing process.

Winthrop emphasizes that the discovery of the “monster” was on the same day as Hutchinson’s excommunication, stating:

The manner of the discovery was very strange also, for it was that very day Mistris Hutchinson was cast out of the Church for her monstrous errors and notorious falsehood; for being commanded to depart the Assembly, Mistris Dyer accompanied her, which a stranger observing, asked another what woman that was, the other answered, it was the woman who had the Monster. (281)

Winthrop then again repeats significant physical details of the infant, stating that the child was exhumed and “though it were much corrupted, yet the horns, and claws, and holes in the back, and some scales, &c. were found and seen of above a hundred persons” (282).

Again, the language Winthrop chooses to describe Hutchinson’s doctrinal views mirrors his description of Dyer’s baby; Hutchinson committed “monstrous” errors and Dyer gave

⁵⁷ Traister goes on to argue that “The male exclusion from the birthing room entailed the assertion of male institutional power in the forms of birth records, baptism, and the public announcement of new birth in the colony” (141).

birth to a “monstrous” child that, coincidentally, shared many physical characteristics similar to physical descriptions of the devil, as he stresses with the “horns, claws, and scales.” Further, he views the time of the discovery as a “providential” act of God and not merely happenstance. Finally, as Winthrop stresses, it is not he who has just witnessed the “monstrosity”; rather, more than one hundred citizens can substantiate his claims. With his careful choice of language, Winthrop does not have to overtly state that Hutchinson is dangerous or that being associated with Hutchinson can bring about dire consequences; indeed, his subtlety works well in painting Hutchinson as perilous.

By comparison to the descriptions of Dyer’s “monstrous” birth, Hutchinson’s own “monstrous” birth is not given as much attention. Winthrop records the details in his *Journal*, which Weld then summarizes and relates in his *Preface* to the second edition of Winthrop’s *Short Story*. In his *Journal*, Winthrop records the following about Hutchinson’s birth:

Mrs. Hutchinson...was delivered of a monstrous birth, which being diversly related in the country, and, in the open assembly at Boston, upon lecture day, declared by Mr. Cotton to be twenty-seven several lumps of man’s seed, without any alterations, or mixture of anything from the woman, and thereupon gathered that it might signify her error in denying inherent righteousness. (271)

Weld notes the birth more briefly, stating, “Mistris Hutchinson being big with child, and growing toward her time of labour, as other women does, she brought forth not one (as Mistris Dier did) but...30. Monstrous births or thereabouts, at once; some of them bigger, some lesser, some of one shape, some of another; few of any perfect shape, not at all of

them...of human shape' (214).⁵⁸ Weld goes on to speculate about the meaning of this birth, stating, "And see how the wisdom of God fitted this judgement to her sinne every way, for looke as she had vented misshapen opinions, so she must bring forth deformed monsters; and as about 30. Opinions in number, so many monsters" (214).⁵⁹

Clearly, both Winthrop and Weld relish the idea that Hutchinson's "monstrous" birth, like Dyer's, was a direct judgment from God, showing his disapproval of Hutchinson's beliefs and actions, as well as support for the punishments that were bestowed upon her by the town and church. Winthrop states that the birth "signifies her errors" while Weld goes a step further and insinuates that for every wrong belief she had, she had a matching "monster" child. As Ann Kibbey notes, "The belief that the malformed fetuses were proof of the horror of antinomianism associated religious heresy closely with women and implied that beliefs of the antinomians violated the natural, physical order" (112). However, while Weld does very much the same thing here that he does with Dyer in relating the incidents to God's ruling, so to speak, on the controversy, Winthrop's treatment of Hutchinson's birth differs from that which he gave Dyer's.

In his commentary on Dyer's birth, Winthrop takes care to relate the birth to Dyer's association with Hutchinson, who thereby contaminated, in a sense, Dyer's womb with her dangerous beliefs; indeed, he suggests that Hutchinson's intellectual errors were linked to Dyer's physical being, and the contamination manifested in Dyer's physical trauma. Hutchinson's body, in effect, spreads the disease of antinomianism to the bodies

⁵⁸ It is widely accepted that Hutchinson expelled a hydatidiform mole, as result of a molar pregnancy. See Traister, Lang and Schutte.

⁵⁹ One might also interpret this as an implication of promiscuity, another form of illegitimate mothering.

of others. Winthrop is not the only man to make this type of accusation. In Hutchinson's church trial, Thomas Shephard describes Hutchinson as "a verye daynerous Woman to sowe her corrupt opinions to the infection of many" (353). Even John Cotton, once her defender, used "infectious" rhetoric to refer to her, stating "And soe your opinions fret like a Gangrene and spread like a Leprosie, and infect farr and near" (373). That these men repeatedly relegate Hutchinson's intellectual arguments and beliefs in her trials to a type of physical contagion underscores their attempt to control Hutchinson's body. They may not be able to control what she thinks or what comes out of her mouth, but they can control the representation of these thoughts and words, and they do so by attaching a physical menace to them, a type of illness that could devastate all who come into contact with it. Indeed, they do this as they excommunicate her from the church when they refer to her as a "leper," which strongly makes the case that her physical body, not her mind, was somehow diseased. Furthermore, Winthrop's description of the baby borrows from iconographic imagery of the devil, which inherently steps up the level of contamination that Hutchinson purportedly instilled upon Dyer.

However, his handling of Hutchinson's birth is much different, for he makes no reference to any kind of devilish features that the "children" have. Rather, he places significance on the fact that Hutchinson's birth contained only male parts and no "mixture of anything from the woman." Traister presents a convincing argument regarding this statement, stating, "Similar to the female withdrawal into confined space of midwifery and the midwife's removal from overt patriarchal supervision, the monstrous birth metaphorically signals the female withdrawal from the anatomy of reproduction" (145). Moreover, Traister goes on to state, "Hutchinson's uterine growth additionally

indicates a divine judgment of masculine agency, insofar as the birth-remnant focuses exclusively on semen as the only physical evidence of divine censure” (146). Given that Winthrop states that the birth results in no contribution from “the woman,” meaning Hutchinson, as Traister stresses, Winthrop indeed removes Hutchinson from the equation. His interpretation, therefore, highlights the repeated admonition given Hutchinson in her trials that she was behaving too much like a husband and preacher, or, in other words, behaving too much like a man. This interpretation brings to mind statements in her trial that insinuate her perceived male masquerade, such as the one by Thomas Shephard: “But seeinge the Flewentness of her Tonge and her Willingness to open herself and to divulge her Opinions and *to sowe her seed in us* [italics mine] that are but highway side and Strayngers to her” (353), or in other words, taking on the masculine role in reproduction. Shephard’s statement underscores the reprimand given her for neglecting her “household” duties, or, in other words, for neglecting her role as a mother.

For Winthrop and his contemporaries, “monstrous” births would have been considered a “wonder” or a work of God’s “special providence.” As David D. Hall relates in *World of Wonder, Days of Judgment*, “The providence of God was ‘wonder-working’ in making manifest the reach of his sovereignty; such acts of ‘special providence’ represented God’s clearer and more explicit than usual intervention into the affairs of man” (71). And Winthrop and the other men writing about the “monstrous” births of Dyer and Hutchinson would not have been isolated to only the beliefs in New England; as Schutte notes, “the intellectual universe of the...men who wrote about the monsters was not bounded by the Atlantic and the wilderness. All of them were at least familiar with English popular accounts of monsters and prodigies” (86). Hall echoes this

assessment in *Worlds*, stating, “Many of the colonists...read about or were told stories of them [wonders]...Everywhere in Europe people were observing the same kinds of portents and telling the same kinds of stories...The transmitters...were the London printers and booksellers, who churned out tales of wonders in abundance” (72).⁶⁰

Therefore, it is not surprising that Winthrop, Weld, and the other men were interested in these births, for the preoccupation with events that could not be readily explained was common in Puritan society. While Winthrop may have been interested in the science behind the births given his rather scientific explanation of them, his journals indicate that he was more concerned with the representation of the births, the meaning behind them. For Winthrop and Weld, the births represented God’s displeasure with the women’s actions and justified the severe penalties given to Hutchinson.

However, in some ways Winthrop strays from the more typical reporting of these types of wonders. Whereas Weld actively connects the births to God’s judgment (“God was pleased to step in with his casting voice and bringe in his own vote and suffrage from Heaven”), Winthrop is more subtle in his connection to God’s works, never making this connection as overtly as Weld does. Rather, Winthrop seems more interested in associating the women with a “devilish,” masculine force, as his language choices reflect in the description of Dyer’s baby (*horns, claws*), his emphasis on the witchcraft activities of the midwife Hawkins, and his description of the removal of the feminine in Hutchinson’s birth. Perhaps this association is the reason that Winthrop spends so much time discussing the physical aspects of the births. This trend in Winthrop’s descriptions

⁶⁰ In fact, supporting Hall’s statements, pamphlets were also published that detail the circumstances not only of Dyer’s birth but also Hutchinson’s own “monstrous” birth as well, such as the anonymous *Newes from New-England of a most Strange and Prodigious Birth* (1642).

can be seen further in his sketch of the birthing room, where he describes women who were present experiencing a physical phenomenon very similar to that experienced just a few decades later in the Salem witchcraft trials:

The occasion of concealing it was very strange, for most of the women who were present at the woman's travaile, were suddenly taken with such a violent vomiting, and purging, without eating or drinking of anything, as they were forced to goe home, others had their children taken with convulsions, (which they had not before, nor since) and so were sent for home, so as none were left at the time of the birth, but the Midwife and two other, whereof one fell asleepe. At such time as the child dyed (which was about two houres before the birth) the bed wherein the mother lay shook so violently, as all which were in the room perceived it. (281)

Particularly, Winthrop's description of the convulsions that the children experienced in the room can be directly associated with one aspect of the Salem witchcraft trials, for this is one of the afflictions that Abigail Williams, Elizabeth Parris, Ann Putnam, Jr. and other young girls exhibited in 1692 Salem.⁶¹ Furthermore, as noted previously, Winthrop places great significance on the fact that the birth of Dyer's "monster" baby was discovered the very day Hutchinson was excommunicated from the church. As the midwife, Mary Hawkins,⁶² had already been identified by Winthrop as a woman who was

⁶¹ For some scholarly treatments of the Salem witchcraft trials, see the following texts: Mary Beth Norton, *In the Devil's Snare: The Salem Witchcraft Crisis of 1692*; Peter Charles Hoffer, *The Salem Witchcraft Trials: A Legal History*; Bernard Rosenthal, *Salem Story: Reading the Witchtrials of 1692*; Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, *Salem Village Witchcraft: A Documentary Record of Local Conflict in Colonial New England*; and Carol F. Karlsen, *Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England*.

⁶² Mary Hawkins was executed as witch a few years later. See Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*, page 101.

“notorious for familiarity with the devil” (281) and as one of the aspects of trial was determining whether Hutchinson’s beliefs were guided by Satan (273),⁶³ it becomes apparent that Winthrop was slowly establishing a foundation for linking Hutchinson to the devil and laying the groundwork for the Salem witchcraft scare in the early 1690’s.

Winthrop clearly sees Hutchinson as a dangerous body (physically, a contagion of evilness) and figure (as a model for other women) in his society, and he recognized her ability to alter the order of things over which he and other men reigned. As Michelle Burnham states, “The vehemence with which her accusers depicted, condemned, and punished Anne Hutchinson can only be understood in the context of the challenge this new articulation of selfhood posed to the dominant modes of ideology and authority in seventeenth-century New England” (342). In many ways, his reference to Hutchinson as “contagious” was quite apt, as her ideas about religion did indeed spread.

But perhaps even more troubling to Winthrop and the other men were what her ideas and actions represented and the changes that could occur as a result, particularly in relation to the kind of power and the kinds of dominant roles that women had the capability to fill in that society. If women’s roles began to adapt, then the very notion of their society would as well. Unwilling to relinquish control, Winthrop and the other men fought back and ultimately silenced Hutchinson, regaining power. The “monstrous” births merely provided an additional avenue to gain further control, aiding them in consigning the women’s bodies, in these cases, to carriers of monstrous ideas and

⁶³Winthrop states in his *Short Story* that John Cotton “being present, and desired by the Court to deliver his judgment about Mistris Hutchinson her Revelations, answered there be two sorts of Revelations, some are without or beside Scripture, those I looke at as Satanical” (273). John Cotton, trying to resolve this dilemma, spent much time trying to determine what Hutchinson meant with her use of the word *miracle*.

monstrous children. Indeed, the bodies of Hutchinson and Dyer represented the very corruption of God's divinity; in short, Hutchinson and Dyer had sacrificed their holy, gender-unique ability to carry healthy, even "normal" or "human" children. In his attack on motherhood here, Winthrop makes very clear that to be a "good" mother of "healthy" children, women cannot challenge the patriarchal status quo.⁶⁴ Thus Hutchinson can still have her motherhood attacked, despite the fact that she was mother to several children and despite the fact that she was greatly respected as a healer and midwife.⁶⁵ In fact, attacking or judging this woman's motherhood in relation to her "unregulated behavior" is not unusual, as we shall see in the upcoming chapters, for motherhood was a space that remained closed off to men, which in turn made it highly scrutinized. Furthermore, women's role as mother in early America was perceived as the most important responsibility that women could have during the time; any kind of "different" or "unacceptable" behavior was of great interest to the authority system, as we see in Chapter Two, with infanticide cases.

⁶⁴ Winthrop indeed provides much commentary on "bad" mothers in his *Journal*, where, among other things, he discusses several incidents of women who were accused of infanticide. Being accused or convicted of infanticide, as we see in Chapter Two of this dissertation, carried a punishment of swift and sure execution.

⁶⁵ John Wheelwright describes Hutchinson in the following way in his *Memoir*: "Mrs. Anne Hutchinson was a woman of remarkable force of character...as a nurse of the sick, especially in ailments peculiar to her sex, she was singularly skillful...so that in the infant settlement, where few means of alleviating the suffering were to be found, it is not strange that she came to be esteemed as little less than a ministering angel" (Bell 7).

CHAPTER TWO

“THINK ON WHAT YOU HAVE READ”: MURDERING MOTHERS IN EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY NEW ENGLAND

Oh, I can truly say, I loath myself for my sins; I abhor myself; and if I should live a thousand years in this world, it would be in the hatred of all Evil.

~Esther Rodgers⁶⁶

When, on the said Tuesday the Eighth Day of *May*, I was Deliver'd when alone of a Male Infant...I threw it into the Vault about two or three Minutes after it was born.

~Rebekah Chamblit⁶⁷

In 1699 Cotton Mather published the widely read *Pillars of Salt: An History of some criminals executed in this Land for Capital Crimes, with some of their Dying Speeches*. In his preface, Mather states, “It hath been Thought, that the Dying Speeches of such as have been Executed among us, might be of singular Use, to Correct and Reform, the Crimes...upon this Advice, from some *Good Persons*, I have Stollen an Hour or Two, wherein I have Collected some *Accounts, of several Ill Persons*” (1). Of the twelve cases he recounts in *Pillars*, four are infanticide cases; in fact, no other crime was better represented in this text. Texts such as Mather’s, supplemented the very public spectacle that early Puritans might even attend of the hanging of a woman accused of infanticide.

⁶⁶ Rodgers, “The Declaration and Confession of Esther Rodgers,” page 130.

⁶⁷ Chamblit, “The Declaration, Dying Warning, and Advice of Rebekah Chamblit,” page 2.

In fact, confession narratives or “dying warnings” of condemned persons were quite common during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries in early America. While these texts were sometimes published independently or in newspapers, they were found mostly alongside sermons in published broadsides, and they provided religious leaders with a way to highlight the pitfalls that living a life of “uncleaness” might present to members of their communities. Also common were the execution sermons,⁶⁸ which were often published alongside the narratives and took, as their main subject, the “fallen” woman who was accused of the crime.⁶⁹ Because it was usually the ministers who “carefully” and “word-for word”⁷⁰ took down the words of the accused women, these texts are polyphonic in their very nature, for often the women struggled to please the ministers and also tell their stories at the same time. Therefore, multiple voices might be present in a single text, with the woman perhaps proclaiming her innocence or justifying her actions; providing readers with details of her biography so as to possibly gain empathy; revealing the particulars of her accused crime; explaining her spiritual downfall; and asking God for forgiveness. All that is said and also what is left unsaid (or what is written but also what is left unwritten) therefore matters. The relationship of the convicted mother to the narrative is a complex one, and we must mediate the various voices present. And perhaps even more importantly, readers must

⁶⁸ For a discussion of the advent of the execution sermons in late seventeenth-century New England, see Ronald A. Bosco’s “Lectures at the Pillory: The Early American Execution Narrative.”

⁶⁹ People from the community would typically come to hear the execution sermons in a public space immediately before the execution of the accused.

⁷⁰ (See Preface to Chamblit)

also analyze identity in the text, for even as the woman hard to protect it, the very nature of the text often erases it.

Additionally, these confessions and dying warnings should be considered a distinctive genre of literature, for they follow a very precise structure, particularly the confessions of women condemned for infanticide. For example, Daniel E. Williams comments upon the genre conventions in his Preface to *Pillars of Salt*, stating “conventions and formulas were well established, and these indeed were part of what readers appreciated.” He adds: “Nevertheless, beneath the outer rhetorical and structural levels change was drastic, particularly concerning the depiction of authority and defiance” (xi). A short preface giving the name of the accused, the date, and a concise description of the woman’s crime begins the document. Then, the accused offers a biographical statement that usually provides details about date of her birth, parents, childhood and adolescence. Always stressed in this biographical entry is the relationship that the accused has with God and the church, with baptism and process of “falling into sin” nearly always mentioned. The details of the crime come next, followed by some sort of confession. The remainder of the document is devoted to the “warning” that the accused has for others, a warning which attempts to convince the readers to refrain from sin, to obey not only God but one’s superiors, and to convert and/or faithfully attend church. Usually, but not always, missing is any mention of the father of the murdered child.⁷¹

This chapter examines at length one document in this genre: Rebekah Chamblit’s 1733 infanticide case and also considers other narratives to a lesser degree, including

⁷¹ See also Sharon M. Harris’s Introduction and Chapter One to her book *Executing Race*.

Patience Boston's 1734 complex murder case and Esther Rodger's 1701 infanticide narrative. Chamblit's *Declaration, Dying Warning, and Advice of Rebekah Chamblit* is typical of confessions and dying warnings during the eighteenth century. Chamblit, a twenty-seven-year-old⁷² white woman was executed for murdering her male infant just moments after his birth. While Chamblit's *Declaration* follows the precise conventions of the genre, it nonetheless subverts the genre as well, for imbedded throughout the document are instances where Chamblit works hard to insert her voice in the text.⁷³

Chamblit's narrative is said to have been "taken from the mouth" of the accused not written by the accused, by a popular printer of dying warnings and confessions, Samuel Kneeland. He took down the words of the condemned woman and along with his partner Thomas Green,⁷⁴ also printed and sold the text, which also included a sermon by Thomas Foxcroft entitled "Lessons of Caution to Young Sinners"; the 1692 law entitled "The Act to Prevent the Murder and Destroying of Bastard Children"; and a preface to Foxcroft's sermon by the Reverend Cooper entitled "To the Young Readers." Bundled

⁷² This age is actually quite unusual for an unmarried woman with no children. One might expect her to be some years younger.

⁷³ Kneeland and Green published many prominent infanticide cases. One other example is that of Patience Boston, a woman of Anglo and Native American heritage, is the subject of a *Faithful Narrative of the Wicked Life and Remarkable Conversion of Patience Boston*, 1738. This text also follows the conventions of the genre as well, but significant about her text is that not only is it a confession of the murder of the eight-year-old boy, she also mentions the deaths of two (and possibly a third) children to whom she gave birth herself and whom were ostensibly fathered by her husband, an African-American servant. Obviously interesting in her case is the fact that she was executed not for the murder of her own children but for the murder of the master's grandchild. Patience Boston's account in her *Narrative* was "taken from her mouth" by York ministers Samuel and Joseph Moody; Kneeland and Green also printed and sold this text bundled with a preface by the Moody brothers.

⁷⁴ Kneeland and Green were widely known for publishing infanticide narratives and supporting materials. As Sharon M. Harris notes, they so commonly published these texts that "the title page of their criminal narratives changed by mid-century from just identifying their location as 'Queen-Street' to 'opposite the Prison in Queen-Street'" (193).

with these texts and printed, Chamblit's text seems primed to do what it was intended by those securing its publication: serve as a "warning" to society, particularly young women, about the dangers of sinning, in hopes that the audience would in some way see themselves in Chamblit.⁷⁵ The results, however, are not that straightforward, for like Hutchinson, while she did not pen the document herself, her voice surfaces in the text in several instances. She subtly claims her innocence and faults the town's population for turning a blind eye toward the myriad existence of sinful places that she suggests tempted her in the first place even as she is ostensibly acknowledging her crime. Her frustration over the fact that she bears the weight for a crime that she believes others had a part in is clear, and it seems that she does not like to be singled out when others are also sinning. Chamblit's confession illustrates the innate connection between infanticide and seventeenth-century gender ideologies because a woman's nature and character were often linked to her maternity, and such an extreme act confirms the desperate measures a woman will take when she has few options in her constrained life. Further, the lack of attention regarding the father of her child highlights the fact that women were most often linked to "illegitimacy" in its various forms.

The Declaration, Dying Warning, and Advice of Rebecca Chamblit (1733)

A Young Woman Aged near Twenty-seven Years, Executed at Boston September 27th, 1733 according to the Sentence pass'd upon her at the Superiour Court holden there for the County of Suffolk, in August last, being then found Guilty of Felony, in concealing

⁷⁵ For example, the writings and sermons of Jonathan Edwards illustrated anxiety about sexual immorality among the youth of his Northampton congregation around this same time.

the Birth of her spurious Male Infant, of which she was Deliver'd when alone the Eighth Day of May last, and was afterwards found Dead, as will more fully appear by the following Declaration, which was carefully taken from her own Mouth.⁷⁶

~Prologue, The Declaration, Dying Warning, and Advice of Rebekah Chamblit

As Reverend Mather Byles walked Rebekah Chamblit along the streets from the prison to the gallows in Boston on September 27, 1733, the “Conversation” was decidedly one-sided. Chamblit, a single twenty-seven-year-old woman who was facing execution for the murder of her infant son, had little to say other than the occasional obligatory statement agreeing with Byles. Rather, Chamblit’s one-line responses to Byles seem to suggest that fear had overtaken Chamblit this day, and understandably so: the gallows came into view during their conversation. Byles says to Chamblit, “But O now prepare---Arm your self with all your courage and submission. Lift up your eyes and see the place—But O lift up your eyes to GOD for his SPIRIT to help you in this most necessitous season” (Foxcroft 73), as the text notes in an aside that “the Gallows here open’d to view” (Foxcroft 73). Chamblit, as in most of the conversation, does not really respond specifically to anything Byles says; instead, she seems to be speaking more to herself: “Lord Jesus, am I come to this!” (Foxcroft 73) is her immediate response to Byles’s assertion for courage. In fact, the last words recorded from Rebekah Chamblit were “Lord Jesus, remember me” (Foxcroft 74), a plea that hardly exudes confidence in her final fate, despite Byles’s earlier assurances that it would be impossible for God to refuse her or “cast her out” of Heaven. Alas, this conversation was not about Chamblit at

⁷⁶ In the *Preface* to Boston’s *Faithful Narrative* the Reverends Samuel and Joseph Moody are forthcoming about the “words” of the woman, stating “It must be confessed, that it could be exactly taken in her own Way of expressing her self” (1).

all, for she was, by her own admission, too “afraid” to say much at all, much less anything rational or telling. In fact, as Sharon M. Harris asserts in *Executing Race*, this “Conversation” exists merely to heighten the drama, with Byles becoming the “heroic figure...struggling to save the soul of the condemned” (49). Chamblit at this point offers us a willing, repentant body, listening quietly.

Readers who are familiar with Chamblit’s *Declaration*, mentioned above, perhaps understand why this woman is so unsure of her eternal fate and why she paid Byles little attention. Recited the day before from her prison cell, Chamblit spoke not with a minister, but with Samuel Kneeland, a printer of popular execution narratives. The text follows the conventions of the genre of dying warnings and confessions. In her *Declaration*, Chamblit provides readers with biographical information, an account of her crime, her thoughts on and relationship with religion, and some advice to members of her society, especially, as she says, young women. Her declaration, taut with subtle critiques of her society’s complex relationship with women’s sexuality coupled with a seemingly torn desire to both repent for her sins and proclaim her innocence, gives a vivid picture of Chamblit’s criminality (the alleged murder of her infant son). However, readers must also examine the underlying themes of illegitimacy and women’s sexuality and how these relate to religion and the law, to popular culture, and to the societal mores of the day. In fact, Sharon Harris states in “Feminist Theories and Early American Studies” that “through the study of infanticide narratives, we have an opportunity to examine how a particularly gendered genre—and a legally gendered crime—participated in the changing cultural production of meaning” (86). Because maternity is so intrinsically connected to what it means to be a “woman,” this particular genre provides even more insight into

gender ideologies during the early eighteenth century.⁷⁷ Furthermore, Elizabeth Dillon argues that “the infanticide narrative smooths and erases the contradiction between individual and social guilt and naturalizes the contradictory limits of social reproduction” (212).

The law which Chamblit is accused of breaking, entitled “The Act to prevent the Destroying and Murhtering (sic) of Bastard Children” and published on the first page of Foxcroft’s sermon that accompanies Chamblit’s narrative states:

That if any Woman be Delivered of any Issue of her Body, Male or Female, which if it were born Alive, should by Law be a Bastard; and that she endeavour privately, either by Drowning or secret Burying thereof, or any other way; either by her self, or the procuring of others so as to conceal the Death thereof, that it may not come to light, whether it were Born Alive or not, but be concealed: In every such case the Mother so Offending, shall suffer Death, as in the Case of Murder. Except such Mother can make proof by One Witness at the least, that the Child whose Death was by her so intended to be concealed, was born Dead. (Foxcroft 1)⁷⁸

Laura Henigman points out that this law is “the only instance of capital murder that did not require two witnesses for its prosecution” (92). Also important to note is the fact that this law seemingly addresses three different scenarios: bastardy, concealment of

⁷⁷ Dorothy Mays notes in *Women in Early America: Struggle, Survival, and Freedom in a New World* that “Infanticide was a woman’s crime. Men were rarely charged, even when the paternity of the infant was known” (210).

⁷⁸The law was passed in England in 1624 and introduced in Massachusetts in 1696. See Henigman’s “I Would be a Witness Against My Self” for a more thorough discussion of the implementation of this law into American society.

pregnancy, and murder, which all relate to Chamblit's situation. Under this law, the single woman's child is given a specific legal title: bastard. If the mother chooses to remain private about the pregnancy (and in essence about her sexual activity and the physical state of her own body), then she does so at considerable risk because if something goes wrong with the delivery, then she automatically is guilty of murder. In essence, no murder has to necessarily take place for a woman to be found guilty under this law.⁷⁹ With a midwife present, however, this risk is negated.⁸⁰ Chamblit and other disenfranchised women who became pregnant out of wedlock, would be particularly affected by this law because they would be without the protection of marriage, as well as without family or easy access to a mid-wife. In fact, Randolph Roth in "Child Murder in New England" discusses the conundrum that infanticide cases present. When a women delivered alone, he suggests, the crime was "easy to commit and conceal" (101). Alone, however, no one is there to corroborate the story of the mother. "Even today," Roth goes on to states, "coroners can determine only in rare instances whether a deceased infant or newborn was suffocated or died of natural causes" (101).

This law, then, serves its purpose well for maintaining an "absent" control over women's personal lives, their bodies, and their sexual choices, particularly women like

⁷⁹ Henigman suggests that this is the way to legislate community supervision of the birthing process.

⁸⁰ Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's *A Midwife's Tale* relates the diary of Martha Ballard, a midwife in the eighteenth century. In this text, Ballard attends several births by single women, including a woman pregnant by Ballard's own son. Having a midwife present at the births of single women could help ensure the health of the baby and the mother, something town officials would have a stake in if the mother was not able to support herself and her child financially. Also, the "custom" of naming the father during the actual birth could also be performed, another possible financial benefit to the community.

Chamblit who chose to keep their pregnancy a secret (which Chamblit may have done for a variety of reasons that we may never know, such as shame, guilt, or even fear of losing her employment if she had any.)⁸¹

Chamblit begins her *Declaration* in the following way: “Being under the awful Apprehension of my Execution now in a few Hours; and begin desirous to do all the Good I can, before I enter the Eternal World, I now in the fear of GOD, give this Declaration and Warning to the Living” (1). From the very beginning, then, Chamblit reveals to the reader that in many ways she is no longer part of the living world. Her statement could be indicative of the fact that Chamblit perhaps had given up all hope and submitted to her punishers and had accepted her conviction; her execution, after all, was scheduled for the next day. However, many parts of her *Declaration* suggest that Chamblit may also have wanted to defend her actions in her final message and perhaps even toss some guilt at other parties. As Sharon M. Harris asserts in *Executing Race*, her narrative was “conventional in many ways” but also moves beyond the norm. Harris specifically notes Chamblit’s emphasis on “lust” as well as uncleanness, but there are other instances in Chamblit’s narrative that beg a closer examination as well.

When Chamblit gives readers the details of her upbringing, nothing stands out specifically at first: she is baptized at age sixteen, she reveals, but “within two or three Year after this [she] was led away into the Sin of Uncleanness” from which time she “dates [her] ruin for this World” (1).⁸² However, things take a turn for her, as she states:

⁸¹ For example, if Chamblit was a domestic servant, she might have feared that an illegitimate pregnancy might jeopardize her job—she could reflect badly on the family, but more likely, a child could cause her to become an unreliable employee if she had difficulty finding help with her child.

“after this I became again more watchful, and for several Year kept my self from the like Pollutions, until those for which I am now to suffer” (1). Chamblit appears to want others to readily accept the fact that during her teenage years, around age eighteen or so, she had a downfall into sin, but that she turned this behavior around and did absolutely nothing wrong until the crime that she now addresses. This assertion may reflect the influence that ministers visiting her in prison undoubtedly had; it allows her to protect her reputation somewhat (she did not spend all her years in whoredom), but it also sends a strong message to others who may contemplate sin, in that one moment of weakness, one indiscretion, is all it takes to find a path to the gallows.

The uncleanness to which Chamblit refers is necessarily connected to the body—it is a sexual uncleanness. As Harris notes, “Chamblit was twenty-seven years old and unmarried; by custom, she should have remained celibate and ignorant of sexuality in general” (*Executing Race* 50). But that was clearly not the case, for Chamblit herself reveals that her first brush with sin came at the age of eighteen, a typical moment for a young woman to become curious about sex and a normal time for women to begin to experience strong feelings of sexual desire. Esther Rodgers, in another prominent infanticide narrative, states that she was “left to fall into that foul Sin of Uncleanness, suffering my self to be defiled by a *Negro* lad” at about the age of seventeen. This relationship with the “lad” resulted in pregnancy for Rodgers. Furthermore, while “custom” maintained that Chamblit and other young women like her be ignorant about sex, the general populace was certainly exposed to it, whether in the form of the “Houses

⁸² Patience Boston’s text also begins with the details of her childhood, following the conventions of the genre.

of Uncleanness” of which Chamblit speaks to perceived immoral sexual behaviors that ministers railed against in their sermons.

In fact, ministerial control of the body was embedded into many sermons and other minister-authored texts of the time, supporting the idea that “it was each man and woman’s responsibility to ensure that the body became a monument to the Lord and not to the Devil’ (Godbeer 62).⁸³ Furthermore, within these sermons, many ministers stressed the importance of heeding the messages presented. For example, in his 1701 sermon on occasion of the execution of Esther Rodger, John Rogers states, “the reading of these sermons...may be a means of startling the Rising Generation and keep others in the sinning of the same kind, and to make them to beware of the works of Darkness, least God bring them to light, and to punishment at the same time...what was done in Secret” (10). Similarly, John Williams in his 1699 “Warnings to the Unclean” states that sexual uncleanness (in this case adultery) is “a sin against man’s own body, it is a defiling of that which should be the temple of God; it is a sin loathsome in it self and makes those who are guilty of it, loathsome to God” (6). But perhaps no one was more prolific than Cotton Mather regarding the body and sexual uncleanness.

Cotton Mather’s 1699 *Pillars of Salt*, written over thirty years before Chamblit’s confession, begins with the following message: “It hath been Thought, that the *Dying Speeches*, might be of singular Use, to Correct and Reform, the *Crimes*,

⁸³ Laura Henigman in *Coming into Communion: Pastoral Dialogues in Colonial New England* discusses the opposing ministerial dialogue and female dialogue that began to emerge in the early 1700’s. She argues that the conversation was two-sided, with each side influencing the other. She points to Sarah Edwards’s influence on John Edwards as support for this claim.

wherein too many do *Live*” (65).⁸⁴ As Daniel E. Williams states, “such warnings of the dead [included in Mather’s text] reconstructed the spectacle of a miserable sinner encountering the immediacy of death and the probability of damnation” (4-5). Mather was not alone in his ministerial reaction to religious backsliding,⁸⁵ an occurrence that can be attributed to “sickness, shipwreck, crop failure, Indian war, sectarian conflict, and political upheaval” (Daniel E. Williams 5). To this list could be added increasing levels of literacy and the advent of the printing press. Furthermore, as Williams suggests, not all those facing execution participated in this phenomenon of published “dying warnings.” Rather, only those who would participate in the minister/criminal exchange properly qualified, and these persons would be those who would agree to the penitent style of the exchanges.

This particular structure allowed ministers such as Mather the opportunity to stress the importance of re-embracing a pious mode of living and to also stress the ministerial role in this process. However, even with the structured, conventional configurations of these texts, instances of subversion can be located, such as those found in Chamblit’s *Declaration*. Even though Mather’s *Pillars of Salt* may have been intended as a lesson for others not to fall into sin, full of lurid stories of adultery and fornication, the text may have also unintentionally given society (and especially young women) a

⁸⁴ In addition to Mather’s *Pillars of Salt*, many of his writings expand upon those sins dealing with perceived as an unholy use of the body. In his personal diary, for example, he notes that “I had often wished for an Opportunity, to bear my Testimonies, against the Sins of *Uncleanness*, wherein so many of my Generacon do pollute themselves” (164-165).

⁸⁵ Also consider the controversy over the Half-Way Covenant a few decades earlier, which allowed children of baptized parents to become church members without having a conversion experience and was created in response to an increasing emphasis on materialism and wealth and a decreasing emphasis on piety among the children and grandchildren of the first generation of Puritans.

look into the sex lives of others. This marriage of the public and private is significant, particularly as the ministerial control Mather and others strove for continued to diminish, for this is exactly what we see in Chamblit's text: she tells her own story in a very public forum about the choices she made regarding religion and regarding sex without ministerial intervention. In fact, by practice, private and public discourse have been seen as separate, but texts like Mather's and Chamblit's link the two spheres together.⁸⁶ Indeed, Harris points out that "Chamblit's case came to trial in August 1733, in the period leading into New England's feverish Great Awakening...the hold of the clergy was slipping, and nothing so evidently marked the downfall of their control as the enactment of capital crimes by women" (50).⁸⁷ Daniel E. Williams also stresses this slipping, stating "in numerous jeremiads the ministers railed at their congregations to return to the pious examples of the first generation" (5).⁸⁸ In fact, we can see an example of this type of rhetoric in Foxcroft's sermon: "Beware lest God in wrath, cut you off *with His stroke*, in a Day you not look for it, in an Hour that you are not aware of...Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a Day may bring forth" (19).⁸⁹

⁸⁶ See Elizabeth Maddock Dillon's Introduction to *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Space* for a good discussion of the literary public sphere as social space that links the public and private.

⁸⁷ Perhaps the most famous sermon written during the Great Awakening is Jonathan Edwards's 1747 "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," which likened sinning and unconverted congregants to spiders dangling precariously from a thin thread held over the burning fires of Hell by God.

⁸⁸ Another prominent jeremiad was the verse sermon "The Day of Doom" (1662) by Michael Wigglesworth, which remained a steady selling book for a century.

⁸⁹ In fact, Foxcroft repeats the phrase "Lest death surprize you" numerous times throughout the sermon.

Mather clearly established a precedent for ministers addressing this subject. Foxcroft, in his sermon “A Lesson of Caution to Young Sinners,” which accompanies Chamblit’s narrative, and which he preached on the occasion of Chamblit’s execution,⁹⁰ certainly contains overwhelming statements of the control that Mather exhibits, not only of the “sinner’s” physical state, but also regarding the spiritual and intellectual states of Chamblit (and of his audience) as well. For example, Foxcroft states at one point, “You may be Masters of a great deal of Knowledge (Science...) but yet have very *wrong Notions* of divine matters of great importance” (35). In addition to science, Foxcroft warns young people of the dangers of philosophy just a couple of pages later (37), perhaps indicative of an overwhelming alarm to the increased secular knowledge of his congregants, knowledge that might rival, literally, the word of God. As Sharon Harris suggests, it is important to note that Foxcroft is not preaching to Chamblit but rather to his audience, and specifically, to the young people of Boston, the very audience to which Chamblit speaks in her narrative. Harris states, “he [Foxcroft] is preaching to the living, and Chamblit, by her actions, is already dead spiritually and about to be dead physically” (48). Foxcroft wants his audience to identify with Chamblit so that he can underscore the fact that they, too, are capable of this wickedness.

And in many ways, the importance of the congregation, of those who had not yet “fallen,” makes sense, considering that “in the ceremonies of public execution the main character was the people, whose real and immediate presence was required for the performance” (Foucault 57). Executions were widely attended during this time; as Hull

⁹⁰ Harris explains in “Feminist Theories” that “the sermons, newspaper accounts, and other published texts that circulated around infanticide cases became a subindustry of the criminal economy” (87).

states, “only a few men and women could crowd into the courts to hear the sentence spoken, but many could and did attend the punishments” (122). And as Ronald Bosco suggests in his study of several execution sermons in eighteenth-century New England, these sermons were directed toward the “intellectual, spiritual, and rational” sentiments of the audience (20). Chamblit was just a small part of a bigger process—her crime was an excuse for Foxcroft to address society at large about some of the “alarming” practices that had taken root in society, and if the people were not coming to him in the physical location of the church, he could still reach them in the form of his execution sermon. Foxcroft wants his congregation to see themselves in Chamblit and to understand that sin is always just an arm’s length away, that they must be constantly vigilant in order to remain free of immorality. With Foxcroft’s help, these people can avoid sin by regularly attending church and upholding the tenants that Foxcroft preaches.

But we cannot ignore the parts of Foxcroft’s sermon where he specifically addresses Chamblit, either, because her behavior is the catalyst for the sermon after all. While Foxcroft’s sermon never refers to Chamblit by name, the minister finally does get around to addressing Chamblit late in his sermon, and he is quite clear in his message to her and about her:

Surely it becomes you to *look back* upon your *past Life* with the deepest Shame and Regret... O reflect with Grief and Blushing on all your Gratifications of fleshly lusts...and see the dreadful Malignity of *your own* Sins in particular, which have been very Heinous in the their Nature...When you consider the deplorable Condition Sin has reduced you to, surely you cannot but blush and tremble. (52-54)

Foxcroft repeats the same thesis in his direct comments to Chamblit for several pages: he wants to make sure she understands the fact that society has deemed her acts, her sins, appalling and terrible, and he wants to make sure she suffers under this knowledge, that she recognizes the nature of these sins as well. Indeed, he wants to see physical evidence (blushing of the face) that she is ashamed by her actions. He refers to her sin as one of “lust” because he comments upon her sin of “uncleanness” but never the murder of the infant. Similar to Mather before him, Foxcroft’s comments here support the notion that the murder is not the crime that is most worrisome to him. Rather, he emphasizes Chamblit’s sexual indiscretions. Murder is a complex crime that has varied contexts; sexual activity, on the other hand, speaks toward the routine practices of a given individual. If the murder is something that Foxcroft does not choose to emphasize, perhaps this silence suggests that he knows that all to whom he preaches are clear about its place as sin. More ambiguous, however, is the sexual transgression. He chooses to focus upon this part of Chamblit’s story because the sexual activities and choices of his congregation are something that he feels he is losing control over; he recognizes the importance of convincing his audience that her conduct was, indeed, wrong, something that ministers just a few decades before did not have to do. Foxcroft then goes on to stress the importance of Chamblit asking for redemption and embracing God and religion in her last days. God is always available, he suggests, even to those who may have forsaken him at some point, which further supports his argument for people to regularly attend church.

Returning to Chamblit’s narrative, Harris finds Chamblit’s account of the crime “typical,” but that assertion needs to be reexamined, for Chamblit, even in her confession,

seems to be subtly suggesting that no murder has taken place after all. This is not unusual: denial can be seen in both the texts of Patience Boston and Esther Rodgers. Patience Boston admits to having a hand in the murder of her two children, although she sways from this admission by stating that “strong drink” drove her to confess to the murder of her second child when in fact she had not killed the infant. She was acquitted of the crime, even with her confession. However, she freely confesses to the murder of the eight-year-old grandson of her master, and this is the crime for which she is condemned to death. Rodgers admits freely to the murder of her first child, stating, “Being delivered of a Living Child, I used means presently to stop the breath of it” (2). With her second child, however, she states, “whether alive, or still Born, I cannot tell” (2). Chamblit is much more assertive about her possible innocence, and she goes to great lengths to explain that it could be possible that her son was born dead (the pain, the long labor, etc.). Chamblit gives the following confession:

That on Saturday the Fifth Day of *May* last, being then something more than Eight Months gone with Child, as I was about my Household Business reaching for some Sand from out of a large Cask, I received considerable hurt, which put me into great Pain, and so I continued till the Tuesday following; in all which put me time I am not sensible I felt any Life or Motion in the Child within me; when, on the said Tuesday the Eighth Day of *May*, I was Deliver’d when alone of a Male Infant; in whom I did not perceive Life; but still uncertain of Life in it, I threw it into the Vault about two or three Minutes after it was born; *uncertain*, I

say, whether it was a living or dead Child; tho, I confess it is probable there was Life in it, and some Circumstances seem to confirm it. (1)⁹¹

Chamblit questions whether or not the infant boy was alive after she delivered him, which in turn clearly can affect her guilt.⁹² If she was in fact alone, then clearly no witness can corroborate her story, which underscores the danger of disenfranchised women. And she states not once, not twice, not even three times, but *four* times that she is not sure if the child was alive after birth. Nowhere in the narrative does it state that she has other children, so it may safely be assumed that this child was her first. Further, she was giving birth alone, scared and in considerable pain. Both of these factors may have affected her ability to know what to do to help the child begin breathing if, in fact, he was not breathing when he was born.⁹³ It is certainly safe to say that any person might be anxious while giving birth alone.

As we read further into the rhetoric of narrative, Chamblit states in her confession that she was having labor pains for four days before she finally gave birth; the possibility, at the very least, exists that her subsequent delivery may have been traumatic for the infant, as four days of intense pain before delivering does not seem routine. Doubting whether the child was alive four times in her supposed confession, she finally

⁹¹ Admission is somewhat cagey in the genre of infanticide narratives. In addition to Chamblit, consider the “confession” of Patience Boston, who admits to having a hand in the murder of her two children, but she also sways from this admission as well. She states that “strong drink” drove her to confess to the murder of her second child when in fact she had not killed the infant. She was acquitted of the crime, even with her confession. However, she freely confesses to the murder of the eight-year-old grandson of her master, and this is the crime for which she is condemned to death.

⁹² However, we must also remember that the law assumes that the child was born alive if the mother delivered alone.

⁹³ See Randolph Roth in “Child Murder in New England,” page 101.

relents and states, almost off-handedly, “tho I confess it was probable there was Life in the child and some circumstances seem to confirm it” (1), a comment which reminds readers that she is likely being coached in her confession, as she so suddenly freely and wholly confesses at this instance after hedging for a several sentences.

Even when she “confessed” she never really says that she knew the child was alive but only that it was probable. This point is an important one because if the child was indeed not breathing, then her crime would merely be her sexual uncleanness, her out-of-wedlock pregnancy, and not murder. However, when we consider Foxcroft’s sermon regarding Chamblit and her situation, it becomes clear that it is not the murder that is significant anyway; furthermore, Chamblit’s focus in her narrative suggests that she understand this as well. The circumstances surrounding the birth remain a mystery, and it is easy to imagine that as she for the fourth time stated she was unsure if the child was living that Kneeland may have gently or even forcibly reminded her that what was he was taking from her was, indeed, a confession.

In fact, it is important to question why she is in actually in trouble. On paper, her obvious crime is infanticide, even though she never admits it, even though there was no way to know if the child was alive, and even though there are no witnesses to the crime. But the law Chamblit has been found guilty of violating (a law enacted in 1692 because “many lewd women that have been Deliver’d of Bastard Children, to avoid their shame and escape their punishment” had been “destroying” their children)⁹⁴ clearly identifies the crime. It states, among other things, that “If any Woman be Deliver’d [of a child] which if it were born alive, should by law be a Bastard, and that she endeavor

⁹⁴ This law virtually mirrored English law regarding infanticide, and there are also court records of trials, confessions, which further substantiate it.

privately, either by Drowning or Secret Burying thereof, or by any other way . . . in every such case the Mother so offending, shall suffer death” (Foxcroft i). However, Chamblit’s later remarks in the narrative suggest that her “crime” does indeed center on her sexual illegitimacy. And aside from the law reprinted with the sermon by Foxcroft that encases Chamblit’s narrative, sexual illegitimacy, not murder, does appear to be the crime. For example, at one point he states, “You have had your Life among the Unclean . . . and for your being wicked overmuch you are to die in Youth, to die before your time” (54). It is the “uncleaness,” not the murder, which Foxcroft emphasizes.

Chamblit herself recognizes why she is the “condemn’d woman.” In fact, she directly addresses this point in her narrative in a few places, but two notable instances stand out. First, she relates her religious slippage with detail, telling the audience the exact time she feels that she first lost God, and second, she emphasizes the fact that Boston is full of “houses of uncleaness.” This moral unscrupulousness, like Foxcroft, is what she chooses to focus upon for most of her narrative, even though she makes it clear in the beginning that she believes she is innocent of the murder.

Indeed, one difference that sets Chamblit’s seemingly conventional narrative apart from others is the fact that it was not taken by a minister but instead by a printer. Harris suggests that this distinction gives Chamblit some room to “include a critique of her society within the usual discourse of confession narratives” (50), and this assertion does seem to be the case when examining her rhetoric. Chamblit is very quick to point to possible reasons, outside her own responsibility, that may have contributed to her predicament, a predicament that she defines as “lust” and “uncleaness,” coincidentally, not the murder for which she is condemned because the murder of an infant did not evoke

the same reaction as sexual promiscuity. The latter had the capability to erode male power. Uncleanness, though, carries much weight during this time, and it was the subject of many sermons, particularly by Cotton Mather, who in the late seventeenth century delivered several sermons on the subject. Foxcroft also mentions this term in relation to Chamblit in his sermon.

As Kathleen Brown points out in “Murderous Uncleanness,” published in *A Centre of Wonder: The Body in Early America*, “Throughout the colonial period, sexual wrongdoing produced the most emotionally charged public language about cleanliness. . . illicit sex inspired inflamed rhetoric not simply because it was an odious and potentially expensive sin for the community but because it combined immorality with bodily filth” (81). In fact, Foxcroft identifies three “distinct Heads” in his sermon regarding Chamblit, three themes that are emphasized repeatedly in the text. One of these “Heads” deals explicitly with uncleanness; Foxcroft states, “Of those, who die in Youth, many there be, *whose life is among the Unclean*. The implication Foxcroft makes here, coupled with the fact that Chamblit, a young woman, is indeed heading toward an early death, cannot be ignored. Those who make sexual choices that dwell beyond what ministers consider acceptable or “normal” will pay consequences of the highest degree. Shame and embarrassment, Foxcroft argues, are the emotions that these young people should feel—but they are not punishments; rather, death is the punishment that many, like Chamblit, must face.

Like Mather, Foxcroft, and other ministers of the day, Chamblit freely talks about a sexual awakening that young girls particularly might be susceptible to.⁹⁵

⁹⁵ Which interestingly, puts Chamblit in the position of minister in a sense.

Chamblit states, “I most earnestly and solemnly Warn all Persons, particularly YOUNG PEOPLE, and more especially those of my own Sex, against the Sins which their Age peculiarly exposes them to, as [this sin]...has brought me into these distressing Circumstances” (1). Again, it is not the alleged murder of her infant child that has landed her a day away from execution, but rather the fact that she submitted to the sexual desires that she, as a woman at a certain age, naturally experienced.⁹⁶ She recognizes the fact that other young, single women may also experience these same sexual urges, so she in turn emphasizes the dangers that lust (and sex) pose to young woman. Men, perhaps, are kept out of her discussion because she realizes that they have more freedom in this regard; after all, it is she, not the anonymous father of her child, who is in trouble.

This recognition by Chamblit departs from the popular opinion regarding women and sexuality by Mather and others during the early eighteenth century, a “dramatic shift” as Godbeer states, “from earlier representations of women as lewd and morally untrustworthy” (266). Indeed, women at this time were not represented as sexual aggressors but rather persons who needed protection from untrustworthy men who may try to take advantage of them. In fact, the perceived danger lay not in women pursuing sexual urges, but rather their *weakness* in giving into the desires of men. For example, the first narrative published in *Pillars of Salt* details a story about a young girl, Mary Martin, whose “Weakness” and “Folly” contributed to her giving into the temptations of a married man in whose house her father left her. Not commenting upon the actions of the older man with whom Mary’s father, in the name of friendship, had left his daughter,

⁹⁶ Hoffer and Hull, *Murdering Mothers* (1981), contend that a large percentage of women during the mid-eighteenth century were likely innocent of the murder charges and instead victims of a ministerial backlash against sexual uncleanness and a collapse of conventional values.

surely trusting the man, Mather seems to suggest that the brunt of the mistake rests with the young girl. This blame Mather casts solely on the young woman seems to support Godbeer's sarcastic statement that "women were apparently much better equipped than men to withstand such temptations" (266). Chamblit, perhaps recognizing this current perception in society, is quick to suggest that women are just as susceptible as men in having and acting upon sexual desire.

Chamblit goes on to say that this advice should be seen as particularly useful to young women in Boston because she is persuaded of this particular sins "abounding ...in this Town and Land" (1). Later on, she again implicates the town itself, stating, "I am sensible there are many Houses in this Town, that may be called Houses of Uncleaness, and Places of dreadful Temptations to this and all other sins...O shun them, for they lead down to the Chambers of Death and Eternal Misery" (1). Chamblit takes the opportunity to stress the point that it was in fact quite easy to find others who also engaged in sexual misdeeds, a fact that surely did not please local ministers, and a statement that might have been censured had Kneeland been a clergyman and not a printer.⁹⁷ This statement places emphasis upon the slipping control of a once very powerful ministerial presence in the personal lives of early New Englanders.⁹⁸ Perhaps the lack of control also contributes to the fact that Chamblit was accompanied to the gallows by Reverend Byles, not the prison personnel that we might imagine would do so; the fact that this was standard practice points toward the need for a ministerial presence to push the agenda of ministerial control, which was by all accounts really an agenda of the wishes of the congregation, as

⁹⁷ As Harris states in "Feminist Theories," the controlled discourse was distributed through the pulpit, the courtroom, and the press" (87).

⁹⁸ See Henigman, page 92.

they chose their minister. In this way, ministerial control was an extension of established arrangements of the male dominant social power. His public dialogue with her aided in the public spectacle, a spectacle over which the church had an investment in demonstrating to the hundreds of townspeople there in attendance that they had complete control of the situation, of Chamblit, and ultimately of her soul. In fact, Henigman stresses the importance of this kind of spectacle in regaining some of the slipping control that ministers enjoyed in the seventeenth century, suggesting that scenarios such as this one was an attempt to “compensate for that loss” (92). It is easy to imagine the impact and sensation that Chamblit’s execution likely generated, and it is important to note here that ministers often took “starring roles” in the mayhem leading up to the execution.

But as Foucault suggests in *Discipline and Punish* there was always the risk of the ritual of the public execution being “overturned” (60), and “the great spectacle of punishment ran the risk of being rejected by the very people to whom it was addressed” (63). In fact, as Foucault suggests and Daniel E. Williams states, “criminal narratives risked transforming the condemned into heroes” (63). Acutely aware of this fact, the ministers seem to take every precaution to maintain at least a perceived control over the situation, and they are ready to take any opportunity available to them to reinforce their importance, their necessity, to their community. But ministerial control was indeed slipping, and while the conventions of the genre are apparent in Chamblit’s text, places where she attempts to subvert the power structure are also evident.

Chamblit certainly is not blind to the power of the church, and she provides deliberate commentary on the subject in her narrative, commentary which becomes more complex upon a close reading. It is clear in her narrative that Chamblit has not always

submitted readily to her situation, as some of her statements hint at uncooperativeness with town officials and probably ministers, for she states, “[I] am sorry for any rash Expressions I have at any time uttered since my condemnation” (1). Readers have no way of knowing what these “rash” expressions may be, but since she makes it clear that she believes that she is not guilty of murder, it is easy to guess at the nature of these “rash” expressions. Perhaps she maintained steadfast innocence and refused to admit guilt; perhaps she called out others in her community who lived her same lifestyle; maybe she even named the father of her child. Whatever they may have been, her apology in the narrative indicates that she regrets these “expressions,” for she likely now realizes that they may have contributed to her sentence. Indeed, Chamblit demonstrates some insight about the power of church over society, over law, and over her predicament:

my mispence of precious Sabbaths, lies as a heavy burden upon me; that when I might have gone to the House of GOD, I have been indifferent, and Suffer'd a small matter to keep me from it...I tell you, verily, your lost Sabbaths will fit heavy upon you, when you come into the near prospect of Death and Eternity. (1)

This comment may be interpreted many ways, but two distinct possibilities stand out, the first one being that perhaps had she attended church regularly she would have wanted to please God or would have more faithfully followed the tenants of the church. She might be married and have children, for example. In any case, this comment certainly represents her concern about her damnation in afterlife, a reasonable concern in her situation. It is a logical assumption that Chamblit is considering the afterlife, the unknown, and she has a vested interest in “protecting” herself as much as possible.

The second possibility, however, is more subversive. Perhaps Chamblit realizes that attending church regularly might have given her more security in her current predicament. Maybe she would have had a midwife present at the birth of her child, for example, or maybe her punishment would not have been so severe if she had been seen as a good church girl who just temporarily lost her way. Whatever the case may be, Chamblit clearly recognizes the control the church has, even if it is slipping, and some of her comments stand out as attempts at gaining the good graces of those in power. For example, she states, “I have had more comfort and satisfaction within the Walls of this Prison, than ever I had in the ways of Sin among my vain Companions, and I think I wou’d not for a World...have my liberty in Sin again” (1), a statement that is difficult to digest given her denial of guilt.⁹⁹ Granted, in some ways this statement is accurate—Chamblit has, in fact, been found guilty of a crime that society has always detested because it is one that is perceived as going against nature. In this respect, she certainly was not the most popular resident of Boston. Also, her imprisonment afforded her some shelter from those influential peers who she suggests have been her company in her sinful ways. In other words, the prison isolates her from these kinds of temptations. However, one must also consider the fact that if she thinks she is falsely imprisoned, then clearly those walls have not been a comfort to her. If she has been guilty of “rash expressions,” then it is clear that those prison walls have not been agreeable to her in some form or fashion.

⁹⁹Interestingly, Esther Rodgers makes an almost identical statement: “I find a thousand times for comfort and delight in this Prison along, than I ever did with them” (130).

As is typical with this genre, Chamblit stresses throughout her narrative the importance of religion.¹⁰⁰ In many cases, these narratives read like conversion narratives, with the accused formerly lost in the ways of God but after their imprisonment having found the light. Chamblit's narrative at times comes close to this kind of conversion rhetoric, but she pulls back before completely submitting to it. Instead, she is more interested in advising young people to be careful about their choices when it comes to religion. Chamblit advises, "I would advise those of my own Sex especially, to chuse (sic) to go into religious Families, where the worship and Fear of GOD is maintained, and submit your selves to the Orders and Government of them" (1). Indeed her statements here go hand-in-hand with Foxcroft's sermon, which states, "He that dies in youth, with his sins unpardon'd and unrepented of, enters immediately upon a never-expiring state of Woe and Misery, Sorrow and Despair" (17). However, it is not entirely clear to whom she advises these young women to submit.

At first, her counsel to "submit" may suggest that she advises these women to submit to God, but a closer reading reveals that she actually advises women to go into religious families and submit to the orders and governments of the families; the "government" of these religious families is undoubtedly the male head of household. Additionally, distinctions clearly exist between submitting to this government and a legitimate conversion or genuine devotion to religious mores. Chamblit could have easily advised women to follow God, but this is not the advice she gives at this point; later she tells young people in general to "secure an Interest in the Lord JESUS CHRIST"

¹⁰⁰ To illustrate the overwhelming presence of religion in this genre, so does Patience Boston. In fact, the vast majority of Boston's *Faithful Narrative* is devoted to religion, and she carefully chronicles the moments in her life when she had embraced it or forsaken it. She also speaks much about the ministers who helped her repent after she was found guilty of the murder.

(1). Securing an interest in Jesus Christ is quite different from submitting completely to him (or the ministers), and it also strays from the idea of giving up one's autonomy, the ability to make decisions independent of the church. Notable is the fact that this advice includes both young men and women, whereas her earlier advice of submission includes young women only.

Chamblit provides some insight into her own relationship with religion and God, but she evidently has some confusion regarding her eternal fate. She undoubtedly has had ministers counseling her in all matters related to religion, but she still seems unsure as to God's plans for her. At one point in her *Declaration*, she states that "I found by experience that upon my thus leaving GOD, He was provoked to forsake me" (1), and in another section of the text she states that she hopes "GOD has discover'd to me in some measure the evil of this, and all my other Sins and enabled me to repent of them in Dust and Ashes; and made me earnestly desire and plead with Him for pardon and cleansing in the precious Blood of the REDEEMER" (1). She is not really sure if she has completely repented; the irony of course is that the entire text supposedly serves as penitence. This text's purpose is for Chamblit to share her story so as to provide an example to other women and to highlight the concern about the instability of families; indeed Chamblit is literally supposed to be an example and nothing more. And this example carries a dual purpose, first to provide other young women with an idea of the dangers sex and giving in to sexual desire poses and second, so that Chamblit can publically repent. Both clearly have the means to boost the power that the clergy have over members of the community. The text in this way attempts to deprive Chamblit of any kind of identity at all, yet Chamblit also struggles against this deprivation.

Foxcroft and Chamblit seem to have very different purposes in each of their narratives in terms of constructing a particular public identity for Chamblit. Foxcroft's sermon never refers to Chamblit by name, as Sharon Harris notes; instead, she is the "condemned woman"; "unhappy young woman"; and the "poor Creature." And the preface to Foxcroft's sermon, "To the Young Readers," written by the Reverend Cooper, fails to mention her name specifically as well; rather she is the "Malefactor" and the "Dau'ter of Death." Similarly, Patience Boston was the "bloody Malefactor" in the Moodys' *Preface*, and she was the "Indian servant" in contemporary newspaper accounts. Esther Rodgers was "a poor Wretch," among other titles.¹⁰¹

This trend works to make Chamblit and the other women accused of infanticide monstrous, so the congregation would be dissuaded from having sympathy for them. However, Chamblit constructs an alternate identity in her narrative. She tells us, for example, in the beginning of the text that she was brought up "well instructed" in her father's home until she was twelve. She tells us exactly what her downfall was and when it occurred, and she provides insight into her relationship with the church and with religion. And most importantly, she is not merely an example; rather, she has solid, good advice for the young women of Boston.

With her subtle critiques and her eagerness to preserve her own identity and voice in her narrative, Chamblit ensures that it is not her actions that are the example to young women but rather her words, her own unique experience. Her crime, she steadfastly maintains, was not murder but sexuality. Her crime was that, as someone who

¹⁰¹ In fact, even in modern-day infanticide cases, the women are often given nicknames by the media. For example, Melissa Drexler, who killed her infant son at her senior prom after giving birth to him there, is the "Prom Mom." Casey Anthony, the Florida mother who is accused of killing her three-year-old daughter, is commonly referred to as the "Tot Mom."

had abandoned the church, she had no influential connections, no help when she needed it. And the punishment for her crime was that, as a woman, she bore the physical marker of this crime in the form of pregnancy. Men, she understands, need not worry about this threat, which is why she addresses them very little throughout her text. It is the women whose bodies betray their actions.

This betrayal, so to speak, indeed supports the fact that when the crime of fornication did appear before the court for prosecution, “it was usually because a pregnancy had resulted” (Demos 152). And while men were just as likely to be brought forth for the crime of fornication, it also becomes quite obvious what rests behind the trend of men resisting fornication charges: proof.¹⁰² If women were silent regarding the name of the father, then little could be done, even though town officials often sought out the name of the father, particularly when the woman had little means.¹⁰³ However, women were often quite willing to name the father.¹⁰⁴ In fact, during the actual state of childbirth was one of the most common times a woman would name the father of the illegitimate child, perhaps finding security behind the fact that the pain and stress of

¹⁰² See Cornelia Hughes Dayton’s *Women before the Bar: Gender, Law, and Society in Connecticut, 1639-1789*, particularly, chapter three, “The Eighteenth-Century Double Standard.” See also Laura Thatcher Ulrich, *A Midwife’s Tale*, pages 147-160.

¹⁰³ See Ruth Wallis Herndon’s *Unwelcome Americans: Living on the Margin in Early New England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001) for a thorough discussion of the origins of the welfare system in early America. One of the areas Herndon explains in this text, for example, that when poor, single women with no supportive family had a baby, their “hometowns” were secured. The woman would then promptly be sent to that town, which was responsible for supporting the woman and her child.

¹⁰⁴ Patience Boston’s own husband reported her to authorities when she confessed to him that she murdered their second child. Esther Rodgers also tells who the father of her children is, but she also explicitly states that not only did he not know she killed the infants, he did not even know she was pregnant.

childbirth prevented her from “protecting” her lover. Demos states, “when delivery was actually in progress and the girl’s powers of resistance were presumed to be at their lowest ebb, the midwives were likely [to seek the name of the father]” (152).

Chamblit’s text reveals no mention of a father at all, and she states that at the time of her delivery, she was “alone”; no midwife was present.¹⁰⁵ Rhetorically, the silence in the text regarding the father is immense and underscores the inequality of men, women, and single parentage during that time. In fact, no mention of a potential father exists in the historical record regarding Chamblit’s male infant. Given Chamblit’s age of nearly thirty, several years older than the average of twenty when women during the time married,¹⁰⁶ we might speculate that Chamblit may not have known who the father was. Indeed, it is plausible that Chamblit worked as prostitute, which also could somewhat explain the “houses of uncleanness” to which she refers in her text. Another possibility for the absence of the father could be that Chamblit was very determined to protect his identity, which could suggest that he had a position of high standing in the community.¹⁰⁷ Whatever the case may be, rhetorically, the silence in the text regarding the father is immense and underscores the inequality of men, women, and single parentage during that

¹⁰⁵ Randolph Roth provides interesting information regarding women who were successfully able to hide their pregnancies from others, something that Chamblit clearly was able to do to some degree. He states, “Unwanted pregnancies could be kept from public notice...especially pregnancies that came to term in late winter or early spring, when expectant mothers could live quietly out of the public eye or stay wrapped in heavy clothing” (102). He goes on to explain that a large percentage of infanticides thus occurred in April or early May “when people emerged from their long winter hibernation,” Such is the case with Chamblit whose suspected infanticide was early May.

¹⁰⁶ See John Demos *A Little Commonwealth*, chapter ten, for a discussion of the average age men and women married.

¹⁰⁷ Another possibility, though less likely because of Chamblit’s silence on the matter, could be that Chamblit was a victim of a sexual attack. See Sharon Block, “Bringing Rapes to Court” for an in-depth discussion of the challenges women faced in bringing a rape claim to court.

time. The inequity is indeed quite clear but perhaps readily explained with a key biological difference between these genders. Women physically bear the manifestation of pregnancies; their bodies betray their sin, so to speak, whereas men's bodies obviously do not. Women, not only perceived as the "weaker" sex, were also easier to catch when engaging in sex outside of marriage just because of their physicality. As Chamblit's belly grew and it became harder to conceal, she likely isolated herself, which no doubt incited much gossip about her physical state. Quite simply, whoever the father was, he did not have to deal with the same set of problems that Chamblit did. As Dorothy E. Roberts points out, "Fathers who abandon their children can escape criminal responsibility simply by leaving the children with their mother. As long as he is not living with the mother, the father escapes responsibility when his failure to provide harms the child. Mothers, conversely, have an immediate and unavoidable duty to care for their newborn children" (99-100).

Chamblit conventionally ends the text with a final urging for women to embrace or re-embrace God. The significant part of this conclusion, though, comes a couple of lines later when she states, "And O what Comfort will this yield you when you come to that awful Day and Hour I am now arriving unto. I must tell you the World appears to me vain and empty, nothing like what it did in my past Life, my Days of Sin and Vanity, and as doubtless it appears now to you" (1). These words, then, clearly are addressed to other sinners, another fact that suggests a lack of control the clergy has among the youth in the community, a fact that surely calls the piety of Boston into question and surely places some anxiety within those ministers trying to maintain control over the actions of their congregants, their societies.

N.E.H Hull states in his Introduction study of felony crimes of women in colonial Massachusetts that “crime demonstrates the priorities of a society, and the anger and frustration of those left out, or behind, in those priorities” (1). In eighteenth-century New England, as in England itself, women were expected to uphold fairly defined standards; women, according to normative standards, were wives, daughters, mothers—these roles were a woman’s “natural” course, and not only was she expected to fulfill these roles, it was assumed that she had a natural affinity for them. While women of course were many other things, these were the roles that remained privileged in this society. When women ventured beyond those roles, reactions were mixed and the “rules” murky. In the same way that the laws regarding fornication, adultery, rape, bastardy, and capital punishment were in continuous flux, so were the opinions of society in general toward these women affected by such things. One constant remained, however: the choices that these women made were certainly scrutinized by all, and perhaps no one paid more attention than the ministers of the time who were constantly struggling to maintain the control they enjoyed in the seventeenth century. When women made choices that not only strayed from the norm but also strayed from what was considered morally sound, ministers reacted quickly. But they did not have the only say any longer. Women like Rebekah Chamblit, guilty or not of the crime for which they had been convicted, increasingly wanted to speak for themselves in their final moments, and as tracts like Chamblit’s became more popular, booksellers provided such women with an alternative way of speaking out that was no longer as clearly under the control of the ministerial elite. As the people were backsliding in their religious mores, the ministers were backsliding in their religious grip over society.

Texts such as Franklin's widely circulated "The Speech of Miss Polly Baker," discussed briefly in the Introduction to this dissertation (and published just a short fourteen years after Chamblit's case), clearly point toward an emerging shift in authority. As Franklin satirically appoints a beleaguered but rhetorically gifted single mother prostitute as the lone voice of logic amidst a room full of important but somewhat opaque male leaders in the community, this shift becomes apparent. And while Franklin no doubt found this casting of Polly Baker amusing, the choice still holds significance. When Miss Baker makes her argument that church and state should be separate, that the fact that it makes no real sense that she routinely is punished in civil court for a moral crime, one cannot help but think of Chamblit and Foxcroft. Foxcroft, so distinctly in his sermon, points toward the sin of uncleanness as Chamblit's true crime and the reason that she is sent to the gallows—the very point against which Polly Baker/Benjamin Franklin argues.

While ministers struggled to maintain a stronghold over those who strayed beyond the established "moral law," novelists who took as their subject women much like Rebecca Chamblit increasingly entered the scene. Chapter three of this dissertation deals with two such authors, Susanna Rowson and Hannah Webster Foster.¹⁰⁸ As Sharon M. Harris suggests, these authors influenced the cultural attitude toward women like Chamblit with their seminal novels, *Charlotte Temple* (1791) and *The Coquette* (1797), respectively.¹⁰⁹ And while the subjects of their novels certainly did not evade punishment for their nefarious deeds—indeed death was a kind of punishment in each

¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, Chapter Four examines *The Scarlet Letter*.

¹⁰⁹ Also, it is important to point out that English novels such as *Clarissa* greatly influenced the American seduction novel.

author's novel—sympathy for these women, perhaps for the first time, entered into the equation. Whereas infanticide narratives deal with the economics of moral versus legal language, the novels offer a divide between reality and fiction. Furthermore, the ministerial presence figures much less in the public discourse of illegitimate birth, and is nearly erased in these two fictional accounts of “fallen” women. In their place, is the guidance of parents and the influence of friends both trustworthy and not. Also significant in these seduction novels is that fact that the men who play a role in the depravity are highly visible as well. In this way, the novels present not an individual problem, as do the infanticide narratives, but rather a social problem. And what we find is that like Chamblit, many of these female characters are used as scapegoats for the sins of an entire community. Furthermore, they have the added benefit of sympathy from their readers because they do not murder their children—they face shame, isolation, poverty, perhaps like Rebekah Chamblit, but the shame is not so overwhelming that they resort to murder, perhaps because there is a striking ministerial absence.

CHAPTER THREE

SEPARATING FICTION AND REALITY: EARLY AMERICAN FICTION'S UNWED MOTHERS

The dutiful, faithful wife, though treated with indifference, has one solid pleasure within her own bosom, she can reflect that she has not deserved neglect—that she has ever fulfilled the duties of her station with the strictest exactness; she may hope, by constant assiduity and unremitting attention, to recall her wanderer, and be doubly happy in his returning affection; she knows he cannot leave her to unite himself to another: he cannot cast her out to poverty and contempt; she looks around her, and sees the smile of friendly welcome, or the tear of affectionate consolation, on face of every person she favours with her esteem; and from all these circumstances she gathers comfort: but the poor girl by thoughtless passion led astray, who, in parting with her honour, has forfeited the esteem of the very man to whom she has sacrificed every thing dear and valuable in life, feels his indifference in the fruit of her own folly, and laments her want of power to recall his lost affection.

~Susanna Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*, pp. 66-67

In September of 1782, almost fifty years after Rebekah Chamblit's infanticide narrative, when Patience Converse of Brookfield, Massachusetts, learned she was pregnant with the child of Benjamin Gilbert, a junior infantry officer in the Continental Army, she went to her father for help in the matter. Her father, Colonel James Converse, wrote a letter to Gilbert in which he explained that his daughter had named him the father of her illegitimate child and expressed his wish that Gilbert marry his daughter. Gilbert wrote the Colonel a letter in reply that owned up to his intimate relationship with Patience, stating that the "misfortunes afflicting [Patience and himself were] just punishments for [their] unwarrantable practices" (Gilbert 69). However, he also advised

Colonel Converse that his immediate return to rectify the situation was impossible because of his duties in the army, but that he would return sometime that fall or winter “to compromise the matter and do justice to [the] person and character of [Patience]” (Gilbert 71). In the ensuing months, despite the fact that he had already acknowledged his part in the pregnancy, Gilbert began to question his responsibility, suggesting that other men were on intimate terms with Patience at the same time that he was, stating “that if no man is more guilty than myself, she has conceived without the seed of man” (Gilbert 71). Furthermore, and likely much to the irritation of Colonel Converse, in March of 1783 Gilbert had yet to return to Brookfield to settle matters.

For anyone familiar with fiction in early America, the experience of Patience Converse, so far, seems to be stolen from the pages of an early American novel that might serve as a cautionary tale for young women: do not have premarital sex, for you might be ostracized and abandoned, or worse, you might die. However, unwed motherhood in late eighteenth-century America, while by no means encouraged, was no longer as criminalized as it had been just decades earlier. Whereas in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, single women (and sometimes, the men whom the women named as fathers, if they chose to do so) were regularly brought up on fornication charges, changes began to occur as the eighteenth century progressed. For example, courts, rather than automatically summoning the unwed pregnant women to appear, began to give these women the option of paying a fine instead (Ballard 150-151). Men were even more likely to be brought in to court alongside the women, but if alone, women were less likely to be coerced by the court into naming the father of the child (Dayton 188). Rather, single pregnant women regularly volunteered the name of the

father to the court, so that they could receive financial support for their child.

Furthermore, when men were brought in on fornication charges, a guilty plea was not automatic; instead, men either chose to plead not guilty and request jury trials or, more frequently, settled with the woman out of court before the trial date, either monetarily or with marriage.

As Laurel Thatcher Ulrich notes, “historians are still debating the significance of such changes” (148). Perhaps these changes signify society’s grudging, if not acceptance, at least acknowledgement, of changing patterns in sexual mores, something that actually began to take shape in the late 1600’s. For example, as early as 1689, John Williams, a New Haven clergyman, lamented in a sermon, “time was when the accusations of conscience made [fornicators] tremble [but many now] commit this Sin...without remorse” (Dayton 187). But perhaps even more likely, these shifts seem to question the conventional ways in which premarital sex and illegitimate births were viewed by the law and by the parties involved, indicating the tension between an increased scrutiny on morals and family values,¹¹⁰ residuals from seventeenth-century Puritan America, and an emerging individualism that comes into fashion in nineteenth-century America. Whereas women in the seventeenth century often faced community rejection, difficulty in marrying, and/or possible banishment, women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as the communities in which they lived, seemed to take these types of illegitimate births more in stride.¹¹¹ They happened, and perhaps some

¹¹⁰ Family values, for instance, relating to the value on marriage, child-rearing, etc.

¹¹¹ Consider, for example, Hester Prynne, who is discussed in the final chapter of this dissertation.

gossip and rumors ensued, but then they were dealt with in a number of different ways—the lives of those involved did not stop.

This is not to say that illegitimate births were a private affair: they were still very much in the public eye. However, while the community in which the women lived was typically very much aware of women who became pregnant out of wedlock, how the women and their families chose to handle the illegitimate births became more of a private decision, rather than a public, entirely legal one. Just as Benjamin Franklin's fictional Polly Baker, in 1747, challenged civil law when she suggested that mothering illegitimate children was, in all actuality, not a matter for the civil courts to punish, men and women's reactions to fornication charges by courts signified a new stance to this so-called "crime": once legal affairs, illegitimate births began to become matters handled primarily by the parties involved and their families, with the legal courts standing by the side if necessary. And in fact, this trend is reflected in the way that the unwed pregnancy of Patience Converse and Benjamin Gilbert was resolved.¹¹²

In November of 1783 Benjamin Gilbert finally returned to Brookfield to face Patience Converse and her father, albeit after a warrant was presented to him regarding his part in Patience Converse's pregnancy. He acknowledged his part in the pregnancy and promised thirty pounds to her and her family, half of which he paid on the spot and the other half of which he paid in one year. Patience and her father accepted this

¹¹² Similarly, on October 23, 1791, a young, single woman, Sally Pierce, summoned midwife Martha Ballard to her parents' home to help her deliver her child. Once Ballard arrived, she made a startling confession: the father of her illegitimate child was Jonathan Ballard, Martha's son. Martha Ballard writes in her diary that Sally delivered a healthy baby boy and named Jonathan as the father (for as midwife, part of her duty was to secure the name of the father of single women, if possible, so recording this fact in her diary was not unusual). Additionally, Ballard later reveals in her diary that Sally Pierce sued Jonathan for paternity, for "maintenance for her child" (155). See Chapter Four of *A Midwife's Tale*, pp. 134-161.

settlement, and Gilbert was ostensibly “free” from his debt to the Converse family. He apparently had little difficulty getting on with his life, and he soon married thereafter, in 1787. Patience too was able to get on with her life. She married a man by the name of Nathan Prouty in late 1784, barely a year after her dealings with Gilbert; she was already pregnant with Prouty’s child at the time of their marriage (Godbeer 261).

For Patience Converse, her unwed pregnancy likely caused no more turmoil than a good deal of stress and worry, as she, by all accounts, was able to rather seamlessly continue her life and marry mere months after the birth of her illegitimate child.¹¹³ Furthermore, her case also demonstrates the reduced role that the civil courts had in resolving the matter. While Converse and her father found it necessary to seek some involvement from the courts (as they sought a warrant for Benjamin Gilbert’s arrest), this action was clearly used merely as a warning, as a way to spur the father of her child to recompense her for their child, likely either monetarily, as he eventually did, or in the form of marriage. Once Gilbert approached Converse with some form of “payment,” the courts no longer had a necessary role in settling the matters; rather, the matter was handled privately among the involved parties. Clearly there is no way to determine any amount of “shame” or “guilt” that this woman felt upon becoming pregnant in a single state, but it certainly seems that her main concern was not to hide the pregnancy in any way, from the community or especially from her friends and family, as her father took

¹¹³ Sally Pierce was also able to marry after her illegitimate pregnancy, though in her case, she managed to marry the father of the child, Jonathan Ballard. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich explains that no legal record exists that documents the fact that Sally Pierce sued Jonathan Ballard for “maintenance of her child,” noting that Martha Ballard’s diary reveals that Jonathan and Sally married in February of 1792, just four months after the birth of their child and one month before his trial was to be held at the Sessions (Ballard 155). Jonathan Ballard apparently changed his mind, no doubt his looming court date taking no small part in this decision.

such a central role in helping her resolve the matter; instead, her primary goal was to receive acknowledgement and some type of support from the father of her child. It seems she accepted the baby and does not seem obliged to marry, as marriage was not one of her primary concerns at this point. And if anything, in this particular situation Benjamin Gilbert appeared to demonstrate more symptoms of guilt or shame than Converse, considering the fact that he was hiding out, avoiding the Converse family, and trying to blame other men for Patience's pregnancy.¹¹⁴

It follows, then, that perhaps the case of Patience Converse does not necessarily mirror early American novels of the time after all, for the consequences of unwed motherhood, as represented in the two best-selling novels of eighteenth-century America as well as other early American fiction, were much more damning and dramatic. Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1794) tells the story of Charlotte, a teenage girl who travels to America with the rogue Montraville, only to be abandoned penniless and pregnant with his child. Similarly, Hannah W. Foster's *The Coquette* (1797) follows the story of Eliza Wharton, who, after spurning the advances of the suitable Reverend Boyer and encouraging those of the questionable Major Sanford, finds herself pregnant with the already-married Sanford's child. While Rowson's tale is completely fictional, Foster's novel is based upon the true story of Elizabeth Whitman, a poet whose tragic circumstances were widely known across early America.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ This is also the case with Sally Pierce as well, as Jonathan Ballard agreed to the "after-the-fact" marriage that he seemed to spurn upon first hearing of Pierce's pregnancy.

¹¹⁵ Albeit not as popular, yet a third novel from the eighteenth century, *Amelia: or the Faithless Briton, An Original American Novel* (1798), mirrors these plots, with the protagonist, Amelia, suicidal after finding herself pregnant and abandoned by a British soldier. In this case, Amelia's father finds his daughter right before she is about to commit suicide, and he begs her not to do it, telling her that he and her mother will help Amelia care for her illegitimate child.

Plots such as these were aimed at young women particularly, for as Cathy Davidson explains in *Revolution and the Word*, young, white, and unmarried women under the age of twenty-five were the primary readers of early American novels. Reasons for this readership include the fact that the population in late eighteenth-century America was young; also, the youth during this time, especially women, was more literate than the older population because of an increased importance placed upon children's education as the eighteenth century progressed. Authors, therefore, wisely acknowledged this readership, with the "mean age of the hero and heroine in novels written in America before 1820 is under twenty-five" (Davidson 188). The marriage choice, consequently, was a popular plot consideration in the fiction of the time because it naturally coincided with the interests of this particular middle-class audience. The lack of educational opportunities available to women at the time coupled with coverture laws of the eighteenth century, Davidson argues, made the marriage choice a critical decision, for after marriage the woman ostensibly would be completely dependent upon her chosen husband, legally, financially, and socially.

Informed by English novels such as Eliza Haywood's *Rash Resolve* (1725), *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* are didactic in tone and in many ways function as "warning" sermons to young women, much like the execution sermons of the beginning of the century. Many scholars also argue that they give readers access to a unique, and still mostly untold, story of women in Early America, conveying issues of women's sexuality, class roles, gender roles, and conceptions of marriage and motherhood. In this way, these texts have the potential to do much cultural work, particularly in regard to

exhibiting the restraints that prescribed gender roles placed upon women. However, what this argument and others similar to it may not consider is the fact that these novels also illustrate a very distinct separation between reality and fiction. For example, Davidson argues that these novels “affirm both the need to educate women and the uselessness of any such education in a society that has no place for educated women” (186). In other words, the novels advocate agency but then struggle to give the characters access to it. Similarly, these novels highlight a variety of choices for the main characters, but then ignore other choices that might be more logical. It is this deliberate, selective representation employed by early American authors that must be considered when reading novels such as *The Coquette* and *Charlotte Temple*. The separation underscores the complexities of exploring new principles, like women’s sexual freedom, for example, and the decision regarding how these ideologies should be expressed and represented.

Ultimately, through narrative strategies emphasizing silences and gaps,¹¹⁶ these texts consider the possibilities that late eighteenth-century American society offered for young women, both the good and the bad. For example, Davidson argues that while many “socially conservative” readers may have read these types of novels as emphasizing the consequences of sinful or unregulated behavior, readers also gained insight into the social and political climate of an eighteenth-century woman’s world, a world in which choices were few and not always pleasant, a world in which marriage was crucial to social survival (and in some cases even for shelter and sustenance), and a world in which “fundamental injustices of patriarchal culture” were endured on a daily basis. However, as Laurel Thatcher Ulrich points out, women who became pregnant out of wedlock were

¹¹⁶ Much like the infanticide narratives in Chapter Two, the silences and gaps are where we see distinct possible for alternative interpretations.

not fundamentally different from women who conceived after marriage. In fact, Ulrich argues, “unwed mothers, pregnant, and nonpregnant brides often came from the same families” (156).¹¹⁷ Thus the fact remains that the historical record clearly demonstrates that women were able to find avenues to escape these “fundamental injustices” of which Thatcher Ulrich speaks, while the literary landscape suggests that these avenues not only remained unsought by women but also were completely unavailable to them.

Instead of depicting ways in which unwed mothers were able to handle their individual situations, the novels employ specific rhetorical strategies that mask the opportunities for agency might actually exist for these women. For example, while motherhood clearly signifies, among other things, the sexuality of the woman, the novels are silent upon this point, leaving a peculiar and noticeable gap between the methods of seduction and pregnancy of the woman. A pregnant woman physically bears the sign of sex. In other words, her choice to engage in a sexual relationship is revealed through her pregnant body, and hence she must now be recognized as a sexual being.¹¹⁸ Her body thus betrays the silence that she might otherwise keep regarding her sexuality.¹¹⁹ It is at this juncture that the separation between reality and fiction is significant in the novels; the silence is revealed, but the novels seem to want the silence at some points as well. This rhetorical strategy emphasizes the immense divide between the reality of the ways that

¹¹⁷ Ulrich goes on to argue that in fact, if anything differentiated these women, it was in the choice of men. When a man whose family was established in the community was faced with an illegitimate pregnancy, he was twice as likely to marry the mother than a man who did not have a family within the community. See pages 156-158 of *A Midwife's Tale*.

¹¹⁸ See Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel*, page 70.

¹¹⁹ Gillian Brown, in “Consent, Coquetry, and Consequences” questions the idea of female consent in *The Coquette*.

women were able to deal with issues involving their bodies and sexuality versus the way that novelists chose to represent it to young women. What is said and also what is left unsaid (or what is written but also what is left unwritten) therefore matters.

The Coquette

At this time, my dear mamma, I am peculiarly solicitous for your advice. I am again importuned to listen to the voice of love; again called upon to accept the addresses of a gentleman of merit and respectability. You will know the character of the man, when I tell you, it is Mr. Boyer. But his situation in life! I dare not enter it. My disposition is not calculated for that sphere. There are duties arising from the station, which I fear I should not be able to fulfil; cares and restraints to which I could not submit.

~Eliza Wharton to her mother, Mrs. M. Wharton¹²⁰

Last Friday, a female stranger died at the Bell Tavern, in Danvers; and on Sunday her remains were decently interred. The circumstances relative to this woman are such as excite curiosity, and interest in our feelings. She was brought to the Bell in a chaise...by a young man whom she had engaged for that purpose...She remained at this inn till her death, in expectation of the arrival of her husband, whom she expected to come for her, and appeared anxious at his delay. She was averse to being interrogated concerning herself or her connexions; and kept much retired to her chamber, employed in needlework, writing, etc. ...Her conversation, her writing and her manners, bespoke advantage of a respectable family and good education. Her person was agreeable; her deportment, amiable and engaging; and, though in a state of anxiety and suspense, she preserved a cheerfulness which seemed to be not the effect of insensibility, but of a firm and patient temper.

~ Capt. Goodhue,¹²¹ in the *Salem Mercury*; July 29, 1788

Hannah W. Foster's novel *The Coquette* is fiction that is, according to its title page, "founded on fact." The woman described in the above entry of the *Salem Mercury*

¹²⁰ Hannah Webster Foster, *The Coquette*, ed. Cathy Davidson, p. 39.

¹²¹ Goodhue was the landlord of the Bell Tavern.

is Elizabeth Whitman, a poet from Hartford, Connecticut, who grew up in a respectable, well-connected home, daughter to the highly regarded Reverend Elnathan Whitman. When the story of her demise was publicized, it created a quite a stir, spurring gossip and rumors and prompting several editorial comments in regional newspapers, such as one in the *Boston Independent Chronicle* that surmised that the young woman's death proved "a good moral lecture to young ladies" (Davidson 222). Whitman's tragic circumstances also became fodder for Foster's novel *The Coquette*. While some of the conditions remain similar (for example, the circumstances of the actual death and the character names that share initials with those thought to be the players in the factual event), Foster's novel is a fictionalized take on the anomalous circumstances of Whitman, as the full title (*The Coquette; or, the History of Eliza Wharton; a NOVEL*) urges us to remember.¹²²

The plot of *The Coquette* seems at first fairly formulaic, particularly when viewed from the surface: Eliza Wharton is the "fallen woman," succumbing to the advances of a charming rake after the death of her fiancé, Mr. Haly, and after spurning the offers of a respectable minister. Later engaging in a secret affair with the newly married rake, Eliza becomes pregnant and is ultimately abandoned. Judged harshly by her friends and community, Eliza becomes withdrawn and depressed, and eventually she and her infant child die an anonymous, tragic death far from home and without the comfort of family or friends: a sure and scary warning to any young female reader. But upon closer inspection, *The Coquette* is anything but superficial. Rather, it details the intricate social world in which Eliza maneuvers as a beautiful, well-educated, witty, woman who has but

¹²² See Donna Bontatibus's article on *The Coquette* for more insight into the similarities of Elizabeth Whitman and Eliza Wharton.

these traits to pass along to a potential husband, for she has no inheritance to boost her marriage chances. Readers get access, through Eliza, to the choices that her social world presents her, and we watch as she sometimes carefully, sometimes not so carefully, considers the proper path to take. Of course she is not alone in navigating this world. The novel is in epistolary form, and Eliza often seeks, through letters, the advice of her mother, Mrs. M. Wharton, and her friends Lucy Freeman Sumner, Julia Granby, and Mrs. A. Richman. The bulk of the novel is consumed by the voices of these women, as they trade opinions on husbands and potential husbands, offer details about social gatherings which they have attended, and advise, agree, and disagree with one another about the proper conduct of women in relation to men and the domestic sphere.¹²³ It is very much a polyphony of voices.¹²⁴

Perhaps more than any other idea, *The Coquette* is a novel that is about “freedom”: from grief, from domestic entrapment (both by parents and by husbands), and from social expectations.¹²⁵ Some scholars have recently argued, in fact, that what Eliza most yearns for is the freedom to be associated with “class-based idleness.”¹²⁶ Eliza readily embraces freedom whenever it confronts her, so readers must assume that she has

¹²³ For insight regarding the place of women and women’s friendship in *The Coquette*, see Claire C. Pettengill’s article “Sisterhood in a Separate Sphere: Female Friendship in Hannah Webster Foster’s *The Coquette* and *The Boarding School*.” Pettengill argues that many scholars have mostly missed the significance of female friendship.

¹²⁴ See, for example, Ian Finseth’s article “‘A Melancholy Tale’: Rhetoric, Fiction, and Passion in *The Coquette*.” Finseth stresses the importance of language in the novel, maintaining that “In a novel where every word participates in a communicative act, both intratextually and metatextually, Foster pays great attention to how words are used, to the impact they have on people, and to the connections between signs and their referents” (126).

¹²⁵ See Walter Wenska, “The Coquette and the American Dream of Freedom.”

¹²⁶ See, for example, Laura Korobkin’s essay “‘Can Your Volatile Daughter Ever Acquire Your Wisdom?’”

a somewhat implicit disregard for the way that normative gender expectations attempt to subtly define and influence her every decision. All three women offer ready guidance to Eliza when she finds herself suddenly “free” after the death of the Rev. Mr. Haly, her fiancé, the man whom her parents chose for her to marry, to be her “guardian” and “companion” based on his “worth” and “merits.” Eliza, however, can hardly suppress her happiness upon his death, mentioning to her friend that “an unusual sensation possesses my breast...it is *pleasure*, pleasure, my dear Lucy, on leaving my paternal roof!” (5). She states in the very first letter of the novel, to her friend Lucy, that “as their [her parents and friends] choice; as a good man, and a faithful friend, I esteemed him. But no one acquainted with the disparity of our tempers and dispositions, our views and designs, can suppose my heart much engaged in the alliance” (5). The dialogic structure of the text, however, hardly makes Eliza’s voice the dominant, controlling feature of the text, for in her next letter Eliza makes reference to Lucy’s reply, saying somewhat sardonically, “I have received your letter; your moral lecture rather; and be assured, my dear, your monitorial lessons and advice shall be attended to. I believe I shall never again assume those airs, which you term coquettish, but which I think deserve a softer appellation; as they proceed from an innocent heart and ...youthful, and cheerful mind” (7). Eliza is surrounded by friends who have her best interest in mind, but she does not often follow their advice. It is clear in this example that Eliza has not taken Lucy’s advice completely seriously.

The Coquette, within the first few pages, makes it clear to the reader that rather than having one voice that commands the text, one voice that is most engaging or persuasive, the text consists of a multitude of voices that exchange opinions. In *The*

Dialogic Imagination, Mikhail Bakhtin argues that words are active, dynamic social signs, capable of taking on different meanings and connotations for different situations. Language, he suggests, has the ability to disrupt authority and liberate alternative voices. His definition of heteroglossia¹²⁷ can be applied perfectly to *The Coquette*, for this social interaction, in the form of dialogue, is the cornerstone of this epistolary novel. As an epistolary novel, its genre intrinsically emphasizes the complexity of the exchanges of language in the text.¹²⁸ In this way, language can also signify a divide between what a dominant ideology promotes as a controlling moral truth and how a certain segment of society interprets that prescribed truth. For while one precise meaning might be emphasized, readers have the ability and freedom to see multiple meanings inherent in the language of the text.¹²⁹ There is no superior voice present within the text, something, which, of course, the novel's genre establishes. This is perhaps where the idea of the Eliza simply as the "fallen woman" fails before it is even introduced. The reader understands that through the very structure of the text, that simply reducing the novel to one that is about a "right" and "wrong" course of action is too simplistic. Rather, a dialogue is present that the reader can herself enter, and this dialogism is established at the very beginning of the novel, inviting readers to enter Eliza's world and rejoice in her newfound freedom even as they scold her for her "coquettish" behavior in certain situations.

¹²⁷ Utterance is constantly producing a plenitude of meanings, which stem from social interaction.

¹²⁸ See Julia Stern, *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel*, for more discussion regarding the epistolarity of *The Coquette*.

¹²⁹ See Chapter Four, "Discourse in the Novel," in Bakhtin's *The Dialogic Imagination*.

A primary concern for Eliza's friend and family, if not Eliza herself, was her marriage prospects, for Eliza had no inheritance and thus no way to support herself. In an early letter to Lucy, she asks, "Is it time for me to talk again of conquests? or must I only enjoy them in silence? I must write to you the impulses of my mind; or I must not write at all. You are not so morose, as to wish me to become a nun..." (8). In fact, it is quite expected for Eliza's friends and family to be worried about Eliza marrying. As John Demos makes clear, women in eighteenth-century America understood the importance of making a good marriage. The argument may be made, however, that some of Eliza's acquaintances put too much emphasis upon money and inheritance, something that perhaps a burgeoning movement for women's freedom would spurn.

While Eliza Wharton might admire and long for the life of a single woman, she also understood the necessity of a marriage; further, her friends and family certainly would not have let her ignore this fact, even had she tried. For example, her mother pleads to her, "As you are young and charming, a thousand dangers lurk unseen around you. I wish you to find a friend and protector, worthy of being rewarded by your love and society" (40-41). Therefore, while Eliza enjoys parties and dinners and gaiety in general, she is always watchful of male interest as well. She soon meets not one, but two men who arouse her interest and who seem to be taken with her as well: the "good" Reverend J. Boyer and the "bad" Major Peter Sanford. These men and her relationships with them are always discussed by her friends and family in terms of their suitability as

husbands; ignored or discouraged, conversely, is any mention by Eliza of why she feels any sort of attraction toward them.¹³⁰

This point in turn brings up the question regarding how Eliza (and the reader) is supposed to decide who is “good” and who is not. While her friends and family attempt to erase any kind of agency Eliza has regarding her sexual attraction to the men, not in terms of marriage “material” but rather in terms of different levels and types of desirability, Eliza consistently struggles with these feelings. While her friends and family put much emphasis on inheritance, Eliza does not and has little desire to follow through in their advice to her. She constantly is put into situations that force her to weigh passion against social acceptance, much to the alarm of her friends and family.¹³¹ The same might be argued for the ways that Eliza and the reader struggle in their feelings regarding Sanford and Boyer. For example, Sanford is charming, rich (at least Eliza thinks so), and handsome—all qualities women are taught to seek, but on the other hand, he also is dangerous, as well, as only the readers understand. Because of letters he writes to Deighton, the readers know that Sanford has ulterior motives but Eliza is not privy to this information. The audience must therefore decide whether or not to trust Sanford. Furthermore, here, we see the roles of men shift somewhat; they are no longer accusers or patriarchal ministers, but actors in the illegitimacy drama.

¹³⁰ Going back to Chapter Two, considering Rebekah Chamblit’s morally and economically tenuous position, the importance of this kind of protection (and thinking about “good” qualities in a potential mate) might be even further emphasized. However, as we see in Chapter One, this kind of protection certainly did not help Anne Hutchinson.

¹³¹ Susan Staves, for example, in “British Seduced Maidens” posits that the reason that young readers sympathize with the fictional women in these kinds of texts may be found in the fact that the qualities they possess (beauty, modesty, etc.) and the ways that they act are the same as those that their society deems “desirable.”

Friends and family members repeatedly warn Eliza when it appears as if her passion for Sanford is interfering with her ability to choose the more stable, morally appropriate Boyer. When Mrs. Richman, for example, peppers her with questions regarding the “favorite Mr. Boyer,” she is alarmed when Eliza refuses to devote herself then and there to the man. Eliza states, “I am young, gay, volatile. A melancholy event has lately extricated me from those shackles, which parental authority had imposed on my mind. Let me then enjoy that freedom which I so highly prize” (13). Distressed, Mrs. Richman replies, “Of such pleasures, no one, my dear, would wish to deprive you. But beware, Eliza!...The round of fashionable dissipation is dangerous” (13). Yet on another occasion, her friend Lucy gives a similar warning:

Methinks I can gather from your letters, a predilection for this Major Sanford. But he is a rake, my dear friend; and can a lady of your delicacy and refinement, think of forming a connection with a man of that character? I hope not. Nay, I am confident you do not. You mean only to exhibit a few more girlish airs, before you turn matron. But I am persuaded, if you wish to lead down the dance of life with regularity, you will not find a more excellent partner than Mr. Boyer. Whatever you can reasonably expect in al over, husband, or friend, you may perceive to be united in this worthy man. His taste is undebauched, his manners not vitiated, his morals uncorrupted. His situation in life is, perhaps, as elevated as you have a right to claim. (26-27).¹³²

¹³² Moreover, her mother warns her yet again, adding “Mr. Boyer [will prove] a worthy friend and protector” (41-45).

These warnings, however, rather than making Eliza fixed upon Boyer, just add to her confusion, for she cannot shake her opinion that Boyer does not possess a temperament that is suitable to hers. Readers can interpret this sentiment in the following way: Boyer, compared to Sanford, is boring and unexciting. Additionally, Eliza has no desire to be the wife of a clergyman, having for several years already lived the life of the daughter of one. She, perhaps better than Lucy and Mrs. Richman, understands the life that she will lead if she marries Boyer. She tells her mother, “his situation in life! I dare not enter it. My disposition is not calculated for that sphere” (39). Furthermore, Sanford substantiates her doubts, as Eliza reveals in a letter to Lucy: “He [Sanford] painted the restraint, the confinement, the embarrassments to which a woman, connected with a man of Mr. Boyer’s profession, must be subjected...he asked if my generous mind could submit to cares and perplexities like these” (36). While some readers might recognize deceit in the motives of Sanford, others may focus on the fact that he truly seems to understand Eliza in a way that Boyer and her friends and family do not. Boyer’s undesirability should be connected to the cultural diminishing role of ministerial elite. Caution and uncertainty toward Boyer, then, becomes understandable to a large degree. In shying away from Boyer, she is not merely abandoning any kind of “rightness” or superior moral center, she is recognizing and regarding her own needs, needs that Sanford, however rakish he may be and whatever selfish motives he might hold, is at least also acknowledging.

The motives of both Sanford and Boyer must also come into play, for they each have a significant voice in the text. While Boyer’s feelings regarding the “proper” place for women are more subdued, Sanford can hardly mask his feelings of superiority over

women in his conversations with his friend Charles Deighton, nor can he hide his superficial feelings for Eliza. In fact, Sanford has the following to say regarding his first impression of Eliza: “I fancy this lady is a coquette; and if so, I shall avenge my sex, by retaliating the mischiefs, she meditates against us” (18). Later he gives the readers more insight into his motives when he states, “Were I disposed to marry, I am persuaded she would make an excellent wife; but that you know is no part of my plan, so long as I can keep out of the noose. Whenever I do submit to be shackled, it must be from a necessity of mending my fortune” (23). Therefore, the readers know that Sanford has no designs whatsoever to marry Eliza. But at the same time, the readers also know that Eliza has very similar feelings regarding marriage; she states to Lucy, “Marriage is the tomb of friendship. It appears to me a very selfish state” (24). She also comments to Mrs. Richman that she will never “engage” herself to any man before the actual marriage ceremony is complete (30). While Sanford’s comments in his letters makes him appear rakish, his feelings regarding marriage are not all that different than those of Eliza. The readers are therefore forced to at least consider this comparison, especially when Selby points out to Boyer, “I am quite a convert to Pope’s assertion, that ‘Every woman is, at heart, a rake’” (53).

Additionally, Sanford is not necessarily as shallow as he appears. In time he actually seems to fall in love with Eliza; he is, on all accounts, beginning to “reform,” something that Lucy declared to Eliza would never happen. He laments to Deighton:

Love her [Eliza], I certainly do. Would to heaven I could marry her!

Would to heaven I had preserved my fortune; or she had one to supply its place! I am distracted at the idea of losing her forever. I am sometimes

tempted to solicit her hand in serious earnest, but if I should, poverty and want must the consequence...[and] her disappointment in the expectation of affluence and splendor...would afford a perpetual source of discontent and mutual wretchedness. (72)

While some readers might accuse the rakish character of only looking out for himself, this passage makes it clear that Sanford is beginning to reform, that love and virtue is beginning to affect him. While he was merely trifling with Eliza in the beginning of the novel, readers can now trace, through his exchanges with Deighton, a decided transformation. And again, he and Eliza have something in common: both are trapped by the conventions of eighteenth-century American society. Significant in these remarks to Deighton is Sanford's idea that poverty is not acceptable not because *he* would want, but rather because it would make *Eliza* unhappy. And while Eliza is oblivious to these exchanges, the reader can factor these revelations into any decision-making process that she is engaged in on behalf of Eliza.

The fact that the morally right versus morally wrong dichotomy does not apply to this novel is underscored at this point. Sanford has repeatedly expressed his desire not to "love" Eliza, in terms of the traditional romantic love that young readers have been taught to seek, but to merely "seduce" her instead. In this way, rhetorically, the novel emphasizes what literally is absent from the text: Sanford has previously seemed to not want to "love" Eliza in a way that honors and respects her, the kind of rhetoric easily apparent in marriage discourse. Rather, the kind of love he has been seeking is more physical: he wants to express his love to her in terms of sex. He acknowledges in the above passage that he cannot offer her the kind of love associated with marriage; but he

can offer her a physical kind of love. He is literally the avenue for a kind of freedom that Eliza seems to desire but also the avenue to lost virtue as well.¹³³

Although the reader must stay alert to recognize the fact that Boyer, while seemingly the character who might be elected to reign at the moral center of the novel, is in many ways much more shallow than Sanford, Eliza inherently understands that Boyer is not someone with whom she wants to share her life because she connects him to the kind of men with whom she already has experience, her father and Mr. Haly. Boyer often shares his feelings regarding Eliza with his friend Selby. For example, shortly after meeting Eliza, he confides to Selby, “I confess it, nor am I ashamed to rank myself among the professed admirers of this lovely fair one. I am in no danger, however, of becoming an enthusiastic devotee. No, I mean to act upon just and rational principles” (10). Boyer, upon first meeting Eliza, negates any possibility of any passionate kinds of feelings at all. He gives no profession of love, as Sanford repeatedly does; instead, he resolves to keep “rational principles” as the ruling factor in his feelings for Eliza. He goes on to comment upon her disposition, stating, “They [the Richmans] are warm in her praises. They tell me, however, that she is naturally of a gay disposition. No matter for that; it is an agreeable quality where there is discretion sufficient for its regulation is peculiarly necessary to a person of a studious and sedentary life” (10-11).

First, Eliza implicitly understands that Boyer clearly means to contain or attempt to change Eliza’s natural propensity for gaiety, a quality she has repeatedly celebrated to her friends. Eliza knows that Boyer will no better suit her than Haly did, and she does not want to find herself trapped in that way again; indeed, she is quite adamant that she

¹³³ David Waldstreicher, for example, argues that Eliza is a symbol of lost virtue in his article “‘Fallen under My Observation’: Vision and Virtue in *The Coquette*.”

cannot survive this kind of husband. Second, Boyer also admits that the life of a clergyman is one of a “studious” and “sedentary” nature; when Eliza worries later in the novel that her disposition is not suited toward this kind of lifestyle, it becomes quite clear that she is completely correct in this assumption, for Boyer validates this worry early on, not to Eliza, but to the readers. Therefore, it is not merely “coquettish” behavior that keeps Eliza from completely committing to Boyer; instead, she is working on an intimate knowledge of the things she might need from a marriage to ensure her happiness. Boyer simply cannot provide Eliza with what she needs in order to be happy in the marriage state. It is clear to her that she would likely be quite miserable and feel trapped.

The motives of Sanford and Boyer indeed are particularly significant, for their feelings and plans regarding Eliza are only shared with their male friends and the reader—not with Eliza or her friends. It is in this way that the reader becomes better equipped to understand Eliza’s matters related to her suitors; again the dialogic structure of the text provides the reader with the necessary tools to metaphorically enter the dialogue of the text. The reader can easily ask herself, *what should Eliza do?* Or perhaps even more importantly she might ask herself, *what would I do if I were Eliza?* The readers are given the authority and the knowledge to make these kinds of decisions, and they can then prioritize, on a personal level, those things that are important to them as they consider their own marriage prospects. While they are not given an actual voice in the text, readers can nonetheless take on a participatory role in the novel. They can engage in an imaginary, yet meaningful, dialogue with all of the other characters of the text. This feature of the novel can certainly be connected to the language of the

infanticide narrative and their rhetorical attempts to reach out to readers, particularly with the use of gaps and silences.

Eliza acknowledges that she breaks the rules of courtship, and this admission contributes to her sense of agency. She is no mere victim of patriarchal authority; rather, she is an informed, active participant in her own life decisions, and she exercises her ability to make her own choices, fully aware that she may not necessarily be doing the so-called “right” thing. For example, she admits to Lucy, “Brought up in affluence; inured from my infancy to the gratification of every passion; the indulgence of every wish, it is not strange, that a life of dissipation and gaiety should prove alluring to a youthful mind...in this pursuit I have perhaps deviated from the rigid rules of discretion, and the harsher laws of morality” (37). When she slips later and tries to win back Boyer (after Sanford is gone for over a year without writing to her at all), she again acknowledges her error, stating, “Oh that I had not written to Mr. Boyer! by confessing my faults, and by avowing my partiality to him, I have given him the power of triumphing in my distress” (105). Eliza is more concerned here with compromising her principles than she is with being turned down by Boyer, but also, she is embarrassed. She appears ashamed and disappointed that she followed not her own predilection but rather that of society at large.¹³⁴

¹³⁴ In fact, Kristie Hamilton argues in “An Assault of the Will: Republican Virtue and the City in Hannah Webster Foster’s *The Coquette* that Eliza loses her strength of will because she is confused by “ideological codes and empirical experience” (45).

Eliza, however, remains silent regarding her biggest decision in the novel: to engage in a sexual relationship with Sanford, after he is married to another woman.¹³⁵ Rather, Sanford lets the readers in on the secret, stating to Deighton, “Good news, Charles, good news! I have arrived to the utmost bounds of my wishes; the full possession of my adorable Eliza!” (139). Some may argue that Eliza’s silence in this point of the novel indicates that she has lost her voice, that she is now merely a pawn to the advances of Sanford. Davidson, for example, asserts, “denied voice and will, she really cannot be seduced because, simply put, she has no say in the matter. Succumbing to Sanford merely confirms and symbolizes what rejection by Boyer has already proved. Sex is merely a half-sublimated suicide, a decline into a figurative death that prefigures her real one” (xix).¹³⁶ This reading certainly has merits, the least of which emphasizes the problematic silence that befalls Eliza at the end of the novel. However, this silence is a rhetorical strategy on the part of the author as well, for even though language is taken from Eliza at this point in the novel, her silence must be read and measured—it cannot be ignored.

This is where the gaps in the novel become significant. Choice must be considered, for Eliza throughout the novel certainly exercised her right to make her own decisions. Perhaps Eliza’s actions speak louder than words in this case, and perhaps words are meaningless after such a decision has been made. Hardly anything that Eliza could really say would have more meaning than her decision to follow her desires despite

¹³⁵ Bruce Burgett offers in *Sentimental Bodies* that Eliza’s silence is a result of being unable to make her private life socially acceptable.

¹³⁶ Elizabeth Dill also argues that Eliza’s seduction is symbolic of the “ruined woman” in her article “A Mob of Lusty Villagers: Operations of Domestic Desires in Hannah Webster Foster’s *The Coquette*.”

the societal standards that forbid her to do so. Eliza has not “fallen” into an illegitimate relationship; she has chosen it. The choice is there, but it is masked by a gap within the novel. The novel depicts all of the seduction strategies of Sanford; it also depicts Eliza pregnant with her child. What it does not depict is the sexually charged choice that links these two situations. If Eliza cannot have the kind of love with Sanford that society deems appropriate—the kind associated with marriage—at least she can have some type of love. The love that she chooses is one that is implicitly connected to her body, both in terms of the act of sex itself and also in terms of the manifestation of this love: the pregnancy and the physical transformation of her body that signifies that she has chosen sex. Furthermore, even the physicality of the pregnancy is masked in some respects, for Eliza, upon her pregnancy, actually begins to lose weight. Sanford, telling Deighton about his and Eliza’s discovery of the pregnancy, exclaims, “At the first discovery, absolute distraction seized the soul of Eliza, which has since terminated in a fixed melancholy. Her health is too much impaired. She thinks herself rapidly declining; and I tremble when I see her emaciated form!” (140).¹³⁷ The fact that the novel attempts to hide the physical sign of pregnancy highlights the complexities of representing the sexual freedom that Eliza has explored.

Illegitimacy in the novel is not a choice that goes unpunished. More problematic than her silence regarding her sexual relationship with Sanford is the contrition which she displays in her final days and in the final pages of the novel. Gone is the Eliza Wharton

¹³⁷ C. Leiren Mower discusses the “wasting away” of Eliza’s body in her essay “Bodies in Labor: Sole Proprietorship and the Labor of Conduct in *The Coquette*.” She aptly argues that “The progressive wasting of Eliza’s body toward the end of *The Coquette* and her corresponding absence from public discourse can be seen as a logical extension of Eliza’s claims of proprietorship...as Eliza finds herself increasingly less successful in managing the publicness of her body’s performance, the theatrical marketplace...gives way to the domestic seclusion of her family home” (315).

of the first three-fourths of the novel; in her place resides an Eliza who wallows in self-pity. When Sanford reveals to Deighton that “an unlucky, but not miraculous accident, has taken place, which must soon expose our amour” (140), the reader can hardly be surprised. Surprising, however, is the way that Eliza reacts to the pregnancy. Rather than seeking advice from her friends as she has done the entire novel, she becomes secretive and reclusive. She relies solely on Sanford to devise a plan to deliver her from this “shame.” It is at this point in the novel that reality and fiction are most sharply divided. Eliza seems to have lost all of her ability to understand consequences for her actions. She readily admits to Julia Granby that she “admitted [Sanford’s] visits; always meeting him in the garden, or the grove adjoining; till of late, the weather, and my ill health induced me to comply with his solicitations, and receive him into the parlor” (145-146). She reveals to the reader the ways in which she and Sanford managed their trysts, but she expresses shock and embarrassment at the consequences of these actions. And while she remains silent regarding her decision to enter into a sexual relationship with Sanford, her voice is restored at the end of the novel as she expresses guilt and remorse regarding her current situation.

Eliza’s pregnancy is perhaps the only time in the novel in which she decides that she has absolutely no options whatsoever, when in actuality she has several. Eliza sees death for herself and her child as the only real solution to her problem; she tells Julia, “I have not a single wish to live...[and] the greatest consolation I can have, will be to carry it [the child] with me to a state of eternal rest; which, vile as I am, I hope to obtain, through the infinite mercy of heaven, as revealed in the gospel of Christ” (146). Eliza here makes a surprising turn to religion, something that she could not face as the potential

wife of a minister, and the didactic element of the novel is highlighted only at the end. Eliza does in fact receive this mercy from Christ, as she and her child both died during childbirth.¹³⁸ Eliza prays for death so that she and her child do not have to face the shame that Eliza conceives is associated with them.

Yet surely it would have been hard for readers to ignore the fact that Eliza is quite sure that Heaven is a viable option for her. She has committed a sinful act, yet she has no doubts that she is bound for Heaven. Conceivably this assumption is a slippage in rhetoric, but more likely, perhaps this fact indicates that redemption, while not an option for Eliza, is an option for the young readers engrossed in Eliza's tale. And perhaps this redemption may not be solely in the form of religion, for equally hard to ignore is that fact that she could have just as easily raised the child with the help of her mother and solicited financial support from Sanford to help her in the costs of the maintenance of the child. Maybe had she not died she would have eventually married, as Patience Converse and dozens of other young women were able to do. And while the fictional story of Eliza Wharton is based on the "true" story of Elizabeth Whitman, it must be noted that the circumstances surrounding Whitman/ Wharton are much more atypical than critics have pointed out. Women often had more supportive family members and friends; furthermore, not only was a pregnancy out of wedlock Eliza not a death sentence, often women recovered quite well from this act of defiance. Like Rebekah Chamblit's extreme action in Chapter Two, Wharton's story is the exception; Patience Converse's story is the

¹³⁸ See Sharon Harris, "Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette*: Critiquing Franklin's America," who reads Eliza's death as "a condemnation not of one young woman but of an entire society that viewed marriage-aged women as commodities for exchange" (17).

one we should turn to for insight into the unwed motherhood in eighteenth-century America.

Charlotte Temple

For the perusal of the young and thoughtless of the fair sex, this Tale of Truth is designed; and I could wish my fair readers to consider it as not merely the effusion of Fancy, but as a reality . . . if the following tale should save one hapless fair one from the errors which ruined poor Charlotte, or rescue from impending misery the heart of one anxious parent, I shall feel a much higher gratification in reflecting on this trifling performance, than could possibly result from the applause which might attend the most elegant finished piece of literature whose tendency might deprave the heart or mislead the understanding.

~ Susanna Rowson, in her preface to *Charlotte Temple*¹³⁹

Various were the sensations which agitated the mind of Charlotte, during the day preceding the evening in which she was to meet Montraville. Several times did she almost resolve to go to her governess, show her the letter, and be guided by her advice: but Charlotte had taken one step in the ways of imprudence; and when that is once done, there are always innumerable obstacles to prevent the erring person returning to the path of rectitude.

~ *Charlotte Temple*, p. 36

Unlike *The Coquette*, *Charlotte Temple* is not fiction based on fact. However, author Susanna Haswell Rowson wants her readers to believe that it is a story that could easily be “real.” In addition to the novel’s title as it appeared on the title page of the first American edition in 1794, *Charlotte, A Tale of Truth*, Rowson also hints at the potential truthfulness of the story. She writes,

The circumstances on which I have founded this novel were related to me some little time since by an old lady who had personally known Charlotte, though she concealed the real names of the characters, and likewise the

¹³⁹ Susanna Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson, pp. 5-6.

place where the unfortunate scenes were acted: yet as it was impossible to offer a relation to the public in such an imperfect state, I have thrown over the whole a slight veil of fiction, and substituted names and places according to my own fancy. (5)

There is, in fact, a longing for truth that surrounds *Charlotte Temple*, and Cathy N. Davidson discusses this desire in her introduction to the novel, stating, “for Rowson’s readers Charlotte was real . . . those who so loved the novel had to believe it was true” (xv).¹⁴⁰ For example, Davidson relates several examples that highlight the public’s yearning for the realness of Charlotte, including the fact that a tombstone inscribed with her name drew thousands of visitors (xiv) and when the Walton House (legend had it that that it was the farmhouse that Charlotte was evicted from) burned in New York in 1853, hundreds “rushed to the scene” (xv).

Charlotte Temple is fictional, but it shares many other similarities with *The Coquette*. Both novels feature a standard eighteenth-century plot: a young girl is seduced by a charming, yet rakish character, becomes pregnant out of wedlock, and dies heartbroken and alone. But *Charlotte Temple* opens the standard seduction story to include more characters. More specifically, Charlotte is ill advised by a selfish schoolteacher, Mademoiselle La Rue, to receive the advances of Montraville, a Lieutenant in the army. Ultimately, she abandons her boarding school and unbeknownst to her parents, proceeds to America with the dashing soldier Montraville, under the

¹⁴⁰ Steven Epley argues in his article “Alienated, Betrayed, and Powerless: A Possible Connection between *Charlotte Temple* and the Legend of Inkle and Yarico” that the reason that readers wanted to believe so much that Charlotte was real is because Rowson “borrowed freely and judiciously from the highly popular legend of Inkle and Yarico, a tale of seduction and betrayal that many eighteenth-century readers believed to be a true story” (200-201).

assumption that once there he will immediately marry her. Charlotte, however, does not possess the fortune that Montraville yearns to have, and when he meets another woman, Julia Franklin, who has all of the qualities that Charlotte has (beauty, sweetness, etc.) plus a fortune, he ultimately abandons the pregnant Charlotte to marry Julia. Devastated and impoverished, Charlotte dies of sickness, and her father arrives in time to claim and care for her illegitimate daughter.

Perhaps, therefore, this longing for truth in the novel, the longing for Charlotte to be a “real” person just like the readers, can be linked to the fact that in many respects, her situation mirrors real women like Patience Converse. Charlotte falls in love with a soldier, (Montraville), as does Patience Converse (Gilbert). Charlotte becomes pregnant by the soldier but does not marry him, as does Converse. Montraville attempts to make amends to Charlotte monetarily, as does Gilbert to Converse. In many ways, their situations are nearly identical. But as in *The Coquette*, the fiction eventually separates from reality, and whereas Converse receives help from her father, Charlotte is taken away from her father, who would be willing to help her if only he knew her circumstances. And whereas Converse actually receives financial support from Gilbert, the detestable Belcour steals the money that Montraville gives Charlotte. And whereas Converse gives birth to her baby and marries within a year, Charlotte dies of a broken heart. It is plot details such as these that differentiate between fiction and reality.

However, for all of its outwardly standard plot lines, like *The Coquette*, *Charlotte Temple* is a novel that is anything but formulaic. Rather, *Charlotte Temple* allows readers a front row seat in a drama that forces a young girl of fifteen to navigate a world in which good advice is fleeting and treachery lurks around every corner. It is a novel of

choices but also a novel about trust: Charlotte constantly must decide whom to trust as she makes important, life-altering decisions about her sexuality, men, and marriage. In fact, many aspects of *Charlotte Temple* are similar a coming of age story, and readers are privy to the difficult decisions that young women must make as they make the transition from childhood to adulthood.

In fact, Rowson makes quite clear for whom she writes the novel, as she consistently references her young readers throughout the text; indeed she states at one point in the novel, “oh my dear girls—for to such only am I writing” (29). In this way, Rowson asks her readers to become active participants in the text, just as the epistolary genre allowed readers of *The Coquette* to do.¹⁴¹ In many respects, Rowson uses dramatic irony, as the readers are in a better situation than Charlotte is to make these kinds of choices, for they are privy to information throughout the novel that Charlotte is not. Furthermore, readers should learn from the example of Charlotte, Rowson implies, but this very coaching from the author perhaps makes it even more plausible that readers consider other options that Rowson attempts to conceal.¹⁴² It is here that Bakhtin’s theory of heteroglossia provides much insight into this novel as well. Bakhtin states, “At any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups” (291). The readers therefore must decide who has authority, how it is

¹⁴¹ Interestingly, Blythe Forcey argues in “Charlotte Temple and the End of Epistolarity” that the form of the epistolary novel could not survive in the “fast-changing, polyglot world” of eighteenth-century America, citing *Charlotte Temple* as evidence of this claim.

¹⁴² Paul Barton argues in “Narrative Intrusion in *Charlotte Temple*: A Closet Feminist’s Strategy in an American Novel” that Rowson takes on the form of spiritual advisor to her readers as she constantly addresses them.

established, and how it works within the novel because each character acts according to his or her own ideologies, but each character is still capable of and engages in multiple discourses.

The historical moment of *Charlotte Temple* enables readers to understand that Charlotte's choices need not be the only choices that one might make in similar circumstances, for while she has one set of experiences, readers also implicitly understand that other possibilities exist. These possibilities, however, are hidden by a distinct narrative strategy in the text: sentimentality. Just as the silences and gaps mask Eliza's agency in *The Coquette*, the heavy-handed sentimentality masks Charlotte's agency, as well as any kind of reality or "truth," in *Charlotte Temple*. Indeed, sentimentality and its fundamental value to American literature has long been contested in literary circles. This debate is evident in the early works of scholars Ann Douglas and Jane Tompkins. Douglas, in *The Feminization of American Culture*, sees sentimentality as a form of "fakery" and "dishonesty," and she claims it "obfuscates the visible dynamics of development" (12-13). Conversely, Tompkins, in *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860*, views sentimentality as a way to give women a "power and a centrality that . . . thereby [turns] the socio-political order upside down" (139).

Regardless of whether one agrees with Douglas and feels that an emotional response to the sentimentality in the text might excuse one from further political action or whether one sides with Tompkins and feels that sympathy can indeed provide the practical understanding necessary for one to become politically involved, the complexity that "the power of sympathy" bestows upon a text such as *Charlotte Temple* that is mired

in both truth and fiction is difficult to ignore. In fact, the aspects of truth and fiction woven with the sentimental features inherent in Rowson's novel make it an even more complicated text in ways that neither Ann Douglas nor Jane Tompkins address.

For example, a central, continual theme in *Charlotte Temple* is which character to cast in the role of villain, for three people in the novel could easily fit the bill:

Mademoiselle La Rue, Montraville, and Belcour. La Rue can be held responsible for placing Charlotte in an unprotected situation, vulnerable to the advances of Montraville, while Montraville, of course, ultimately leaves her alone and pregnant. But beyond Montraville, there is also another character, Belcour, who attempts to take sexual advantage of the pregnant, heartbroken Charlotte and who also withholds money that Montraville has given him to help support Charlotte and eventually the child. The various threats inherent in the text, therefore, negate any simplistic "right" or "wrong" choice on Charlotte's part, for rather than having a clear path to any sort of moral center, she instead is constantly confronted with varying degrees of danger.

Furthermore, any kind of solution to her difficulties seems nearly impossible for her to easily manage, particularly because she is isolated from her parents, a situation that is plausible but much exaggerated as well.¹⁴³ When the reader perhaps questions the decision of her parents to send her away to school, especially at so tender and vulnerable an age, the concerns are put to rest with a mini-narrative about her parents' courtship, a narrative that is caked in sentimentality.

¹⁴³ The reader understands that the lack of parental influence, for example, plays a huge role in Charlotte's situation. Keith Fudge, for example, in his article "Sisterhood Born from Seduction: Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* and Stephen Crane's *Maggie Johnson*" stresses that "Montraville succeeds in driving a wedge between Charlotte and her parents by making her choose between her love for him or the honor of filial duty" (47).

Charlotte's mother, Lucy, once a student at Madame Du Pont's boarding school, suffered under unfair and tragic circumstances as a young girl, losing both her mother and her brother on the same evening and watching her father be taken to prison for a debt that he really did not owe and had no means to pay off. However, Charlotte's father, wealthy at the time, endeavored to "save" Lucy and her father. He paid off the debt and in the meantime fell in love with Lucy, who was below his station in life. When his father forbid the union, he forsook his father and his inheritance because his love for Lucy was so strong, and evermore, suggests Rowson, their marriage was blissfully happy. Rowson writes, "Love and Health strewed roses on their pillows... such were the parents of Charlotte Temple, who was the only pledge of their mutual love, and who, at the earnest entreaty of a particular friend, was permitted to finish the education her mother had begun, at Madame Du Pont's school" (26). The romantic, touching features of her parents' history disallows for any questioning of Charlotte attending a school that places her beyond the reach, beyond the guidance even, of her loving parents. So when Rowson urges her readers, "oh my dear girls...listen not to the voice of love, unless sanctioned by paternal approbation" (29) we must question what she really means, for Charlotte's parents were not proximal enough to help Charlotte make decisions about love. Instead, she must turn to help from those who are near enough to advise her on the spot, and this necessity (as well as the isolation from her natural protectors, her parents) opens Charlotte up to particular types of danger.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Karen Weyler, for example, notes that unlike Eliza in *The Coquette*, Charlotte does not benefit from many friends who have her best interest in mind.

The advice that Charlotte is confronted with as she makes certain choices within the novel is crucial to her experiences, and the one character who advises Charlotte the most is Mademoiselle La Rue. Manipulative and selfish, La Rue is only concerned with her own personal happiness. For example, when Charlotte expresses regret at a rendezvous with Montraville, stating, "I cannot think we have done exactly right in going out this evening, Mademoiselle," La Rue replies, "Prithee, don't be such a foolish little prude" (29-30). Later, when Charlotte states that she should perhaps show the letter that Montraville gives her at their secret meeting to her mother, La Rue taunts her.¹⁴⁵ She states, "open the letter, read it, and judge for yourself; if you show it to your mother, the consequence will be, you will be taken from school, and a strict guard kept over you; so you will stand no chance of ever seeing the smart young officer again" (31).

It is not to say, however, that Charlotte is so completely naïve that she does not see, at times, the manipulative, dangerous ideas of La Rue. She does attempt to stand up to her teacher, only to be "tricked" by manipulative, melodramatic statements. For example, when Charlotte seems to make the firm decision to talk to Madame Du Pont about her meeting with Montraville for fear of getting in trouble, La Rue tearfully states, "should she hear of it, throw the blame on me...perhaps it will give you pleasure...to see me deprived of bread...lose my place and character, and be driven again into the world, where I have already suffered all the evils attendant on poverty" (30).

Even though Rowson inserts herself in the text to comment upon La Rue's malevolence, stating "let me stop to make one remark...when once a woman has stifled

¹⁴⁵ See Susan C. Greenfield's article "*Charlotte Temple* and Charlotte's Daughter: The Reproduction of Women's Word" for a discussion of the benefits of a mother-daughter relationship.

the sense of shame in her own bosom, when once she has lost sight of the basis on which reputation, honour, every thing that should be dear to the female heart...she grows hardened [and] will spare no pains to bring now innocence and beauty” (32), Charlotte still struggles to stand her ground and defy La Rue. Rowson states, “This [La Rue’s tears] was touching Charlotte in the most vulnerable part” (30). When Charlotte rejects the ill intentions of La Rue, as most young women would sensibly do, sentimentality makes her rethink her initially right instinct. Furthermore, when she does in fact make a poor decision, even then the text distracts readers from judging her or questioning her actions. For example, when she consents to running away to America with Montraville, she is barely even conscious. In chapters ten and eleven, “Conflict of Love and Duty,” Charlotte struggles with the choice before her, but she eventually decides not to go, stating, “I will not go, Mademoiselle; I will not wound the hearts of those dear parents who make my happiness the whole study of their lives” (46). However, her resolve fades when she sees Montraville, and he convinces her to come along after all, but as soon as she steps aboard the chaise, she gasps, “Oh! my dear, forsaken parents,” and then shrieks and faints, the exact reaction, incidentally, that her mother has upon learning of her supposed “elopement”: “she [Mrs. Temple] fell fainting into the arms of her husband” (54).¹⁴⁶ The melodrama again functions as a substitute for any kind of truth that may be gleaned from Charlotte at this point in the narrative; in other words, Charlotte does not have to admit that she wants to go, for she faints instead. She does not have to justify her actions because the novel’s plot does not give her an opportunity to do so. This rhetorical silence underscores the illegitimacy of her choice.

¹⁴⁶ See Julia Stern, “Working through the Frame: *Charlotte Temple* and the Poetics of Maternal Melancholia” for more regarding the concepts of grief and motherhood.

If Mademoiselle La Rue is portrayed as a kind of romanticized villain, as the character who rendered Charlotte vulnerable, then Montraville, the character who takes advantage of this vulnerability, should certainly be understood as despicable at best. However, Montraville, comes across almost as victim-like as Charlotte herself. While many typical seducers are easily pegged as “rakes,” much as Sanford was in *The Coquette*, it is more difficult for Charlotte to see that Montraville too falls under this definition, for seemingly, his actions and characteristics do not mirror typical rake-like behavior. However, without the benefit of the sentimentality apparent in the text, the readers’ perceptions of Montraville certainly alter. Rather than feeling sorry for Montraville, the readers, as well as Charlotte, would certainly be wary of him.

For instance, as with Sanford in *The Coquette*, the readers of *Charlotte Temple* know beforehand that Montraville will never be able to marry Charlotte because of her lack of fortune, for both men have designs to marry wealthy women. However, whereas in *The Coquette*, Sanford alone is responsible for this decision, stating to his friend Deighton, “Were I disposed to marry, I am persuaded she would make an excellent wife; but that you know is no part of my plan, so long as I can keep out of the noose. Whenever I do submit to be shackled, it must be from a necessity of mending my fortune” (23), Montraville’s decision is considerably different, for it was his father, not he, who insisted upon a wealthy woman. Montraville reflects upon his father’s words to him in chapter ten of the novel:

mark me, boy, if ...you rush into a precipitate union with a girl of little or no fortune, take the poor creature from a comfortable home and kind friends, and plunge her into all the evils a narrow income and increasing

family can inflict...neither my interest or fortune shall ever be exerted in your favour. I am serious...print this conversation on your memory, and let it influence your future conduct. (40-41)

The text, therefore, at this point sets up the character of Montraville not to be a villainous seducer, but one who, like Charlotte, is torn between love and filial duty. Not only will he be denied his fortune if he marries Charlotte, but he will also be denied his father's love and money as well. So when Rowson writes at the end of this chapter that "Montraville therefore concluded it was impossible he should ever marry Charlotte Temple" (41), the reader can hardly question this decision and in fact may sympathize with him in his difficult situation. Montraville is not the heartless predator that Sanford and other established "rakes" are; rather, he is a victim of love and social class.

Furthermore, Montraville does not intend to leave Charlotte destitute; he in fact provides for her sufficiently, particularly in the beginning: "Montraville placed her in a small house a few miles from New-York; he gave her one female attendant, and supplied her with what money she wanted" (65). In fact, Montraville's intentions were to always provide for Charlotte, but Belcour, the "true" villain of the story, diverts those funds and keeps them for himself. In fact, one could argue that the only reason Belcour is in the novel is to divert not only the money Montraville intends for Charlotte, but also to divert any blame associated with the actions of both Montraville and Charlotte. For example, when Montraville realizes that he is in love with Julia Franklin, he laments to Belcour, "I feel I shall love and revere Julia Franklin as long as I live; yet to leave poor Charlotte in her present situation would be cruel beyond description" (83). Belcour, wanting Charlotte for himself, takes this opportunity to plant seeds of doubt in Montraville's mind

regarding the fidelity of Charlotte, stating, “Oh my good sentimental friend, do you imagine no body has a right to provide for the brat but yourself” (83). Crushed and “pale as ashes” he replies, “Then there is no faith in woman” (83).

Belcour makes permanent the divide between Montraville and Charlotte when, visiting a sleeping Charlotte one afternoon, he spies Montraville coming up the road through a window and hurries into bed to lay beside her, so that Montraville literally finds the two in bed together. At this point he makes his mind up to distance himself from Charlotte forever and marry Julia Franklin. He gives Charlotte a final goodbye via letter, stating: “you shall never want the means of support both for yourself and your child...once more adieu” (93). Montraville entrusts Belcour to give her the letter and money. Belcour in turn does not fulfill his end of the bargain, for when Charlotte learns of Montraville’s marriage, she becomes ill. “Disgusted” by her “emaciated appearance” Belcour “forgot the solemn charge given him by Montraville; he even forgot the money entrusted to his care...he left the unhappy girl to sink unnoticed to the grave, a prey to sickness, grief, and penury” (98).

Belcour, then, not Montraville, is the one supposedly responsible for sending her to her grave, a reading which completely ignores the fact that Charlotte’s illness is associated with her pregnancy, the result of the decision that she and Montraville made to have sex. However, the sympathy the reader feels here for Charlotte, particularly in her “emaciated” form, masks that choice, literally and physically, for much like Eliza in *The Coquette*, Charlotte is wasting away, even while her body betrays her by physically illustrating the fact that she has chosen premarital sex. This again highlights the struggle that the authors encountered when deciding how to represent the sexual freedoms these

two characters are taking. Rowson addresses her readers after Belcour has left her destitute, “my young friends, the tear of compassion shall fall for the fate of Charlotte...For Charlotte, the soul melts with sympathy” (99). Perhaps in pointing out to the readers what they are likely feeling or what they *should* be feeling, Rowson is also suggesting an alternative reading. The very fact that the author tells the readers that they should feel a certain way ostensibly invites the readers to consider other possibilities.

The very fact that she had chosen to have sex with Montraville seems to be completely erased from the novel; rather, the focus is on Charlotte’s sad predicament more than any of her decisions that got her into her position. Charlotte soon finds herself evicted and sets off in a snowstorm to seek compassion from La Rue, who not surprisingly, turns her away. La Rue’s servant, however, feels sympathy for her and houses her in his poverty-stricken home, where she gives birth to a daughter. On the brink of death, her father finally finds her, and he claims his illegitimate granddaughter upon Charlotte’s last wish: “Protect her” (115). Charlotte then dies, and Rowson writes, “she [Charlotte] regarded her father as he pressed the infant to his breast with a steadfast look; a sudden beam of joy passed across her languid features, she raised her eyes to heaven—and then closed them forever” (116). Charlotte, therefore, in death, was not made to face the consequences of her actions, nor own up to her “sins” to her father.

Montraville, too, is given a reprieve for his actions, for he goes nearly mad upon hearing of Charlotte’s fate. When a soldier on the street describes the dead Charlotte as “a poor girl that was brought from her friends by a cruel man, who left her when she was

big with child, and married another” (117) it is nearly more than he can bear.¹⁴⁷ When he seeks forgiveness from Charlotte’s father, Mr. Temple tells him, “Look on that little heap of earth...look at it often; and may thy heart feel such true sorrow as shall merit the mercy of heaven” (117-118). Temple says nothing of the fact that Montraville seduced his daughter, nor does he mention Montraville’s illegitimate daughter—as with Charlotte, these facts are masked by the sentimentality of the moment. Further compounding the readers’ sympathy for Montraville is the knowledge that he “to the end of his life was subject to severe fits of melancholy, and while he remained at New-York frequently retired to the church-yard, where he would weep over the grave, and regret the untimely fate of the lovely Charlotte Temple” (118).

Left open for question, however, is why, if Montraville was so wracked with guilt, that he did not attempt to forge a relationship with his illegitimate daughter; his guilt, in the end, had no effect whatsoever upon the circumstances of Charlotte or her illegitimate child. However, the historical record supports the fact that guilt often influenced the actions of unwed fathers. Jonathan Ballard, for example, certainly was affected by his guilt with the pregnancy of Sally Pierce, for while he was clearly hesitant to marry her, within just a matter of months after the birth of their son, he made her his wife. Again, as in *The Coquette*, while both novels have “truth” circling around them and both illuminate problems and situations of great concern for women, they are by no means representative of the experiences of single mothers in eighteenth-century America. While authors such as Foster and Rowson wanted to explore new ideas of choice and sexual freedom for women, they sometimes struggled with the representation of these

¹⁴⁷ Ann Douglas argues that this soldier’s account is “Charlotte’s version” of the story. See her Introduction to *Charlotte Temple*.

choices. Eighteenth-century literary representations of single motherhood highlight the moral/religious consequences for women who might choose to live beyond socially accepted boundaries. But readers may have also combed these texts for possible “solutions” to the complexities women faced living under the restraint of normative gender expectations while at the same time experiencing a longing for freedom from these prescribed gender roles. When a marriage choice is not available or not suitable to a woman for whatever reasons, that woman’s sexuality may be manifested through the somewhat problematic idea of illegitimacy, for that woman, while struggling with marriage decisions, may still choose to take ownership of her sexuality, of her body, of the maternal.

In this way, illegitimacy is thrust to the forefront. It is much the same with fictional texts featuring single/unregulated mothers: textually, the women both embody and challenge societal notions of illegitimacy. And much like Fredric Jameson suggests, the narratives, the stories present within these texts, are best understood as they relate to cultural norms outside of the text. It is in this way, then, that reading the fictionalized experiences of the women featured in *The Coquette* and *Charlotte Temple* against the realities of women such as Patience Converse and Sally Pierce becomes crucial in understanding the “problem” of legitimacy in eighteenth-century America. These “real” women in the historical record are dealing with the same struggles as their literary counterparts; yet the women in the novels suffer hugely, with the literary equation, however reductive, ultimately being one that reads in the following way: unregulated, sinful behavior equals death, or illegitimate behavior leads to illegitimate births, which then leads to death.

And while the “truth” in the experiences of women like Patience Converse is readily apparent and easy to find within the historical record, the “truth” in the literary equivalents of these women is masked by narrative strategies. This is where Bakhtin’s idea of heteroglossia becomes important because language can also signify a divide between what a dominant ideology promotes as a controlling moral truth and how a certain segment of society (the readers) interprets that prescribed truth. For while one precise meaning might be emphasized, readers have the capability and free will to glean multiple interpretations from a given text. They can observe the gaps and silences in this texts and put forth their own ideas into the equation; in short, these gaps invite the readers to play an active role in the unfolding drama. The advantage that the “real women” have over their literary doppelgangers, conceivably, comes from an insight they learned from the literature of the day: lack of ownership over the self is perhaps the biggest obstacle that women face, for subjection in all other aspects of life will surely follow if a woman does not even have control over her own body. It is in this way, then, that illegitimacy becomes one possible “solution” to these complexities, however dangerous (as we see in Chapter One with Hutchinson and Chapter Two with Chamblit and the other mothers in the infanticide narratives) or however “normal” (as we see with Patience Converse).

CHAPTER FOUR

THE MOTHERHOOD DEFENSE: DEFLECTING PATRIARCHY IN *HOBOMOK* AND *THE SCARLET LETTER*

“Speak, woman!” said another voice, coldly and sternly, proceeding from the crowd about the scaffold. “Speak and give your child a father!”¹⁴⁸

Partly from consciousness of blame, and partly from a mixed feeling of compassion and affection, the little Hobomok was always a peculiar favorite with his grandfather. At his request, half of the legacy of Earl Rivers was appropriated to his education. He was afterwards a distinguished graduate at Cambridge; and when he left that infant university, he departed to finish his studies in England. His father was seldom spoken of; and by degrees his Indian appellation was omitted.¹⁴⁹

In her article “Hester’s Maternity: Stigma or Weapon,” Monika Elbert argues that “Hester's maternity is ultimately her weapon against patriarchy” (198). This assertion demonstrates the large degree to which unregulated motherhood embodies a certain kind of power. Nonetheless, unregulated mothers are representative of the struggles between church and state as well as religious and civil law. They also thwart prescribed gender roles as well, for no one really knows where they belong. For example, in *The Scarlet Letter*, which this chapter will explore, Hester is confined to a cottage in the woods, on the margins of her village. But her fate is better than that of the other mothers treated in this dissertation. Anne Hutchinson is banished from her community and ultimately killed in an Indian attack. Rebekah Chamblit is put to death, perhaps for the murder of her

¹⁴⁸ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, p. 50.

¹⁴⁹ Lydia Maria Child, *Hobomok*, pp. 149-150.

child but also perhaps because she became pregnant out of wedlock. Both Charlotte Temple and Eliza Wharton die as well, Charlotte from exposure in her weakened physical state after her pregnancy and Eliza from illness shortly after the birth of her child. It is not until the nineteenth century begins to reflect upon its Puritan roots that we see unregulated mothers surviving. And interestingly, they not only live but they are strong and heroic.

While distancing women from the rigid social expectations for women in colonial America, the literary representations of unregulated mothers in the eighteenth century that this dissertation has treated, *The Coquette* and *Charlotte Temple*, nonetheless held these women to a particular standard. Instead of depicting ways in which “real” unwed mothers were able to handle their individual situations, eighteenth-century novels employ specific rhetorical strategies that mask the opportunities for agency that might actually exist for these women. In these sentimental eighteenth-century literary representations of women who make choices that go against convention, the women were social misfits, cast out of their society and punished by death. Unlike their seventeenth-century counterparts, they were able to take control over their own bodies and make independent decisions; nevertheless, they ultimately failed at the end because, in these novels, they were still held to seventeenth-century ideals of womanhood to substantiate and reinforce the message that patriarchal society wanted to send the mostly female readership.

In fact, these novels serve as a strong reminder that in literary representations, “woman counts in society only insofar as she contributes to the marketplace, by perpetuating the race; if she hazards a protest, she’s dead” (Elbert 179). Often in literary representations, mothers who behave in ways beyond what their society deems “normal”

die at the end.¹⁵⁰ Despite the increasing control over their bodies, women in the nineteenth century were still held captive to the beliefs and customs long established by the male-dominant power structure, and in the end, these fictional women were treated in ways that society sanctioned while the “real” women in these situations had varying fates, with some recovering quite well from their similar choices, like Patience Converse in Chapter Three of this dissertation. The fiction, however, of Converse’s time does not tell her story, as that chapter asserted. Rather, the representations are still dominated by patriarchal ideals that dole out punishment and isolation for any kind of female sexual illegitimacy,¹⁵¹ making the idea of the novel as a feminized literary form intriguing and complex, especially since the novels featured in this dissertation are models of the tradition of sentimental literature. We see these kinds of representations not only in the eighteenth century, but also in the literature of the nineteenth century as well.

Nina Baym argues, “The mission of the historical romance is to participate in the patriotic work of establishing and affirming national origins, characters, and values” (155). In fact, several nineteenth century novels explore and revise Puritan representations of unregulated mothers in its literature, and this chapter explores two of these revisions. In fact, the nineteenth century does indeed begin to explore and revise Puritan representations of unregulated mothers in its literature, and this chapter explores two of these revisions. Lydia Maria Child’s *Hobomok* (1824) and Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) will be the primary focus of this chapter because both novels feature transgressive mothers who face the same moral dilemmas and ponder the same

¹⁵⁰ For example, consider not only *The Coquette* and *Charlotte Temple*, but also novels such as Flaubert’s *Madame Bovary* and Chopin’s *The Awakening*.

¹⁵¹ Franklin’s “The Speech of Miss Polly Baker” is one notable exception, however.

solutions as their seventeenth-century counterparts. Each set in seventeenth-century Puritan New England, both novels rely on a link between past and present, and both novels explore the Puritan treatment of unregulated motherhood as a precursor to nineteenth-century treatment of not only mothers, but women in general, particularly in legal and political terms. With the nineteenth century exploring ideas of equality and liberty in ways that had not been done before, it is easy to see why an examination of past representations would be alluring to writers like Child and Hawthorne. Hawthorne and Child were two of the most prolific and most prominent writers of their generation, but it is interesting that these two novels intersect in the way that they do. Child was a feminist; Hawthorne was not.¹⁵² Child's novel reflects her interest in the social traditions and practices of the nineteenth-century, whereas Hawthorne was drawn to religious and historical subjects. Child's novel is social novel, while Hawthorne's novel is a romance, but both novels feature a Puritan setting that greatly influence a woman's life. And both feature women who mother in unconventional ways.

It is within these representations of unregulated mothers that we can observe retellings of unregulated motherhood and examine ideas about patriarchy, about women, and about social independence in early America. Both novels explore what happens when a woman's pregnancy, which highlights a woman's sexuality, is not contained within a sanctioned, Puritan marriage and how the woman chooses to handle the consequences of her sexuality. The fact that the story does not end with the birth of the

¹⁵² Carolyn L. Karcher explains that Child, from a young age, was interested in education but soon realized the sharp gender differences between men and women in this area. As Karcher notes, "The experience of being denied the education lavished upon her brother sowed the seeds of feminist consciousness in Child, just as it did in two women's rights leaders of the 1830's and 1840's who acknowledged her as a forerunner—Sarah Grimké and Elizabeth Cady Stanton" (*A Lydia Maria Child Reader* 7).

child is what sets these nineteenth-century depictions of Puritanism apart from their eighteenth-century counterparts and is what makes these later texts necessary to this dissertation project.

Whereas eighteenth-century novels like *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* end with the birth of the child (typically with the death of the mother and sometimes the child, much like a true-to-life infanticide narrative, in fact) these nineteenth-century texts continue to tell the story. What we see, then, is the unregulated mother actually experiencing motherhood beyond pregnancy, her body recovered from the physical “shame” of an illegitimate or unsanctioned pregnancy. The mother can now resume her pre-pregnancy appearance, and in many ways this transformation can help her become like the other women in her society again. People are no longer reminded, just by looking at physical body of the woman, of her crime. Hawthorne, of course, remedies this by the scarlet A that Hester must wear at all times, and Child’s mother character Mary gives birth to a biracial child, which could serve as a life-long reminder of her illegitimacy. Furthermore, each woman has a child, and in *The Scarlet Letter*, particularly, Pearl is hardly ever separated from her mother Hester. Yet both novels move beyond these markers as well, as Hester’s A begins to symbolize not adulteress but ability and Mary’s child merges neatly into English society, his Indian heritage forgotten, his complexion ignored, and his biological father hardly ever mentioned after she marries Charles.

Thus as the nineteenth century examines its Puritan roots, it also revises the story to highlight the particular strength that patriarchy has never been able to completely control: a woman’s maternity, her ability to become and function as mother. Rules, laws,

and custom can certainly be attached to this role of mother, but it was (and still is) nearly impossible to control a woman's ability to become a mother and how she might behave once she is one. A woman can become a mother whether she is married or not, and barring violence, she has a choice regarding the father of that child. Once the child is born, that mother can choose to instill in that child mores and values that she deems important, regardless of what society tells her, within certain reasonable limits.¹⁵³ It is here that she is following her "maternal instinct," a term that the nineteenth century embraced. Women were not only expected to mother, they were expected to desire motherhood beyond all else. Motherhood was the "natural" state of women, and men were very much isolated from this role and somewhat powerless to control it.

Therefore, if the act of becoming a mother is done outside the established conventions (respectable, recognized marriage), there is really very little that society can do to control that act of illegitimacy, although myriad attempts are taken to regulate it. Meanwhile, the woman now has her motherhood to guard against complete patriarchal control, and her sexuality has now become a threat. Under patriarchal constructs, the woman bears the child, nourishing it both inside and outside of the womb. She is the one who must do the physical labor to produce the child, while the man is on the margin of this process. Once the child is born, that child connects the man and woman together as its parents, the mother shares her parental duties with the father, and a family is formed. However, if a woman chooses to mother alone, and no traditional family is created, she is mothering outside of patriarchal constructs and negating the necessity of the man. It is in

¹⁵³ There exists the possibility that the child could be taken from the mother as well.

this way, then, that the woman's maternity shields her from the patriarchal forces that might try to control her because she has greatly minimized its power.

Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok* uses unregulated motherhood, albeit a slightly more legitimized illegitimacy, to explore Puritan effects on the nineteenth century, with a special emphasis on the plight of the Indian.¹⁵⁴ Because women were "excluded...from the benefits that American democracy conferred on their male peers," Carolyn L. Karcher explains, "middle-and upper-class white women often identified consciously or unconsciously with other excluded groups" (xvii). Crafting a heroine who defies her strict Puritan father and shocks many members of the community (thus rebelling against the established patriarchal norms) when she chooses to marry the Indian Hobomok, Child marries not only the couple in the story but also white and Indian culture as well. In doing so, she attempts to revise long-standing notions about women and love, sex, and marriage, as well as attempts to empower both Indians and women in the political and social fabric of society. *Hobomok* is the first book written by Child, and her strained relationship with her father, who did not appreciate her fervor for reading and education, inspired part of the plot. This first novel brought Child much literary fame, and she continued to write in what became a very prolific writing career. Further, later marrying her husband David Lee Child, a progressive reformist, she developed interests in the abolitionist movement as well as the rights of Indians.

Hobomok tells the story of a young Puritan woman, Mary Conant, who marries an Indian chief, Hobomok, after her Episcopalian love interest, Charles Brown, is supposed dead in a shipwreck. Mary Conant has come to Salem from England to be with her ill

¹⁵⁴ See Carolyn L. Karcher, *First Woman in the Republic: A Cultural Biography of Lydia Maria Child* for the definitive biography of Lydia Maria Child.

mother, who had come to America because her husband, Roger Conant, seeks to free himself from the religious confines of England and freely practice his Puritan faith. While Mrs. Conant and Mary are not aligned with Mr. Conant's Puritan tenets, he nonetheless moves the family to America to an upstart Puritan colony, where his two sons die and his wife becomes deathly ill. When Mary marries Hobomok, she is grief-stricken almost to the point of madness, mourning the loss of both Charles and her mother. However, she does come to admire the "noble" qualities of Hobomok. Eventually, Mary and Hobomok have a child, Charles Hobomok Conant, and live a relatively happy existence until Charles Brown, alive after all, returns to Salem. It is then that Hobomok leaves, disappearing into the wilderness, so that Mary can marry her true love, Charles. Charles embraces young Charles and raises Mary's son as his own, and their son assimilates into white society.

Set amidst a scene of threatening warfare between the white settlers and the Indian inhabitants, this novel follows the story of Mary more than developing the tension and budding violence between the colonists and Indians. And as Nancy F. Sweet nicely posits, "Child shifts focus away from the patriarchal Puritanism of the New England forefathers, to whom history usually accredits the founding of America, ...[and] tells the story of the Americanization of its English heroine through rebellion, violence, isolation, and suffering" (116). In doing so, Child uses the Puritan experience to write the story of a new, burgeoning nation.

In the other novel this chapter treats, *The Scarlet Letter*, Hawthorne looks to Puritanism to examine and critique aspects of American society and culture. *The Scarlet Letter* presents the reader with a history, sharing a legacy of American culture, but it is

here that he also introduces a strong female character in Hester Prynne. The reader does not pity or fear for Hester, for even as we see her in many ways being mistreated, the character herself does not want our tears or our sympathy. Rather, she continues her day-to-day existence with dignity, raises her daughter Pearl to have a mind of her own and to acknowledge her own free will, and convinces both the fictional townspeople and at the same time, the readers, to see her A, a supposed sign of shame, as representing her positive features, her *able*(ness) to function in a society that judged and ostracized her. We see her carry the blame herself when she could easily cast it to Dimmesdale. And we also see her make men dispensable, as she refuses to name Pearl's father, thus denying Pearl, in a sense, a father at all. Instead, Hester chooses to raise Pearl by herself, without the affect of male influence.

Hawthorne's novel serves as a fitting end to not only this chapter but this dissertation as well. It emphasizes the resurgence of interest in Puritan America, as made evident in many historical novels published during the century, including *Hobomok*. In choosing to set his story in colonial America, Hawthorne is able to place a nineteenth-century perspective upon the culture and tell a new version of Puritan America. Hawthorne's novel relates the experiences of Hester Prynne, a woman living in a small Puritan New England village who becomes pregnant even though her husband is (supposedly) not yet living in the community. *The Scarlet Letter* focuses on the "sinful" implications of single motherhood similar to those found in the texts of Rowson and Foster, yet Hawthorne inserts a plot twist, making the father of Hester's child the minister of the community and making Hester a particularly strong female protagonist whose goal is to survive her situation in the best way she knows how. She is rebellious in many

ways, including her refusal to name the father of her child and in the way she raises her daughter Pearl, a precocious child who does not conform to the standards that Puritan America placed upon the behavior of children.¹⁵⁵ The character Hester Prynne provides insight into how unregulated mothers came to be located at the intersection between two culturally dominant models during this period in early America and moves us toward an understanding of why and how single mothers reflect the tension between an increased scrutiny on morals and family values, residuals from seventeenth-century Puritan America, and an emerging individualism that comes into fashion in nineteenth-century America. It also demonstrates the ways that motherhood can be used to a large degree to legitimize nonstandard behavior.

Significantly, instead of hiding or ignoring the myriad ways in which unregulated mothers were able to handle their individual situations, both novels offer alternatives, which although they were real options for real women in earlier periods had nonetheless remained primarily unexplored in the literary landscape. But perhaps the most noticeable intersection of these two novels is the sexual freedom that both women exemplify. It is this autonomy that makes Mary Conant and Hester Prynne such complex characters. Both authors develop women characters who would have perhaps lived on the margins of society but who become heroines in the novels because they resist the normative patriarchal structures in place. Similarly, as Child and Hawthorne draw on seventeenth-century culture to comment upon nineteenth-century culture, we can begin to dissect de Tocqueville's statement: "The Americans are at the same time a puritanical people and a commercial nation; their religious opinions as well as their trading habits consequently

¹⁵⁵ For example, John Demos points out that Puritan children were, from an early age, expected to in many regards act like miniature adults.

lead them to require much abnegation on the part of woman and a constant sacrifice of her pleasures to her duties.”¹⁵⁶ The interpretive moves of both novels explore what happens when women are not guided first by their puritan beliefs but by their own desires. These novels also explore the how motherhood helps guard them from a judgmental, disapproving patriarchal influence.

Nineteenth-century women who were reading these historical novels would have been interested in these independent female characters because they encountered the very obstacles that they did, such as sexual freedom, choice in marriage, and rights/roles of women after marriage. Furthermore, connecting these fundamental debates to their Puritan roots served as a catalyst for change and reflection. Clearly, many authors used the seventeenth century to provide insights into the nineteenth century. As such, many writers returned to Puritan ideologies to justify or challenge existing tenets of patriarchy, which allows readers to see the ways that seventeenth century culture constructed gender norms and defined female illegitimacy (choosing one’s own mate, positioning for power within the marriage or within a society if need be) as well as female normality (motherhood). One need only to consider Anne Hutchinson’s experience of her motherhood attacked in close connection with her decision to firmly and publicly voice her beliefs to see this link.

While some have argued that historical novels such as these “admit, for the first time, the legitimacy of the female dissenter” (Sweet 108), this chapter argues that that

¹⁵⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville begins his influential text *Democracy in America* (1835) stating, “Among the novel objects that attracted my attention during my stay in the United States, nothing struck me more forcibly than the general equality of condition among the people”(Preface). However, in his chapter entitled “The Young Woman in the Character of a Wife” he departs from this notion of equality: “In America the independence of woman is irrecoverably lost in the bonds of matrimony. If an unmarried woman is less constrained there than elsewhere, a wife is subjected to stricter obligations (sic)” (Chapter 10).

feminine legitimacy can only be obtained through the idea of motherhood. Through motherhood, the characters that these authors draw gain a kind of authority, one that had been unavailable to them in their strict Puritan societies before they were mothers. Both Hawthorne and Child test this very idea, reflecting on a Puritan past in order to develop female characters that can deviate from the norm, resist patriarchal tyranny, and survive, doing so through their status as mothers who might be unregulated but ultimately convince their female audience that they have succeeded in this role.

Hobomok

Desolate as Mary's lot might seem, it was not without its alleviations...Hobomok continued the same tender reverence, he had always evinced...So much love could not but awaken gratitude; and Mary by degrees gave way to its influence, until she welcomed his return with something like affection...she knew her own nation looked upon her as lost and degraded...and even he was generally avoided by his former friends...Every wound of this kind, every insult which her husband courageously endured for her sake, added romantic fervor to her increasing affection...before two years passed away, she became the mother of a hopeful son.¹⁵⁷

Getting modest attention in the 1970's, criticism on Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok* has increased steadily since Rutgers University Press published an edited version of the novel under the American Women Writers Series in 1986. Still, the scholarship is not vast, and most critics either write about *Hobomok* in connection with Sedgwick and Cooper, exploring ideas about the vanishing Indian in early and nineteenth-century America¹⁵⁸ or they explore the ways that Child tackled patriarchy and

¹⁵⁷ Lydia Maria Child, *Hobomok*, pp. 135-136.

¹⁵⁸ See Ezra F. Tawil, "Domestic Frontier Romance, or How the Sentimental Heroine Became White"; Mark G. Vasquez, "'Your Sister Cannot Speak to You and Understand You as I Do': Native American Culture and Female Subjectivity in Lydia Maria Child and Catherine Maria

racism.¹⁵⁹ It is within Child's reaction to the nineteenth-century patriarchal structures that we see a seventeenth-century female heroine, Mary Conant, who seeks freedom from the stifling laws of patriarchy (namely her father and religion), emerge. Alongside this character is her mother, also named Mary Conant, who exemplifies a physically weak but intellectually strong woman. With Mrs. Mary Conant, Child uses the role as mother to also break down the normative patriarchal structure. Once unregulated as well, marrying a man her father did not approve of, Mrs. Conant regains her authority and legitimizes her actions through her logical, caring function as mother when she supports Mary's choices despite the elder Mary's husband's disapproval.

The younger Mary Conant certainly provides readers with an example of a transgressive young woman who independently lives the life that she wants to live. And in order to make Mary unregulated (though we might see Puritanism in general and the "ideal" woman in this role as well), Child had to construct her patriarchal counterparts; in other words, she had to have someone or something against which to rebel. It is Mary's father, Mr. Roger Conant, who chiefly provides the antagonistic impulse to the novel. Thus the defiant daughter/tyrannical father paradigm takes root, and "for Child, envisioning the daughter-heroine as a virtuous dissenter enables her to rewrite the legacy of Puritanism in a manner that emphasizes the moral, social, and religious refinement that the daughter-figure represents" (109). And under the defiant daughter/ tyrannical father

Sedgwick"; April Michelle Dolata, "The White Heroine and the Native Man: A Radical Writing of the Frontier Romance and a Revisionist View of America, Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok*"; Harry Brown, "'The Horrid Alternative': Miscegenation and Madness in the Frontier Romance"; and Shirley Samuels, "Women, Blood, and Contract."

¹⁵⁹ See Paula Kot, "Engendering Identity: Doubts and Doubles in Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok*"; Leland Person, "The American Eve: Miscegenation and a Feminist Frontier Fiction"; and Carolyn L. Karcher, "Introduction" to *Hobomok and Other Writings on Indians*.

paradigm, what we find is a father who pushes the daughter toward the insubordinate path, typically committing some kind of specific action that works as a catalyst for the rebellious behavior of the daughter, setting the events for disobedience into motion.

Roger Conant certainly supplies the novel with this type of father.

In addition the strong bond between mother and daughter, religion is another of the key differences between Mary Conant and her father and the primary reason why Mary defies him. A strict Puritan, eager to escape the mother country of England, which he views as tyrannical and eager to have religious freedom, Roger Conant brings his family to a Puritan settlement, Salem,¹⁶⁰ to live. However, readers also learn that Conant perhaps was also eager to escape his disapproving father-in-law who strongly objected to him as a match for his daughter. Child writes, “In his younger days he had aspired to the hand of a wealthy and noble lady. Young, volatile, and beautiful, at an age when life seemed all cloudless before her, she left the magnificent halls of her father, and incurred his lasting displeasure by uniting her fortunes with her humble lover” (8). However, Conant eventually found inspiration in his newfound Puritan religion, and because it became dangerous to speak against the Church of England, Conant moved his family to America. Here, Conant’s two sons died, and his wife’s health rapidly declined,¹⁶¹ yet Conant still had no desire to return to England. Interestingly, even though Roger Conant came to America to escape religious persecution, he still has no tolerance of other religions, an unfortunate fact for his daughter, who has fallen in love with Charles

¹⁶⁰ Which is, obviously, the same setting as *The Scarlet Letter*—one more similarity between these seemingly disparate novels.

¹⁶¹ His daughter Mary, who had lived for a while with her grandfather in England, came to America because her mother was so ill.

Brown, a devout Episcopalian, which sets into motion the transgressive behaviors of Mary.¹⁶² Once Mary decides that she no longer wants to be contained by the rigidity of her father's rules and perhaps her society in general, she makes a conscious choice of defiance, much like Charlotte does in *Charlotte Temple*.

Mary, on the other hand, does not share her father's Puritan beliefs, and unlike many Puritan daughters, she actively disagrees with its tenants. This point is clear in the beginning of the novel when Mary performs an experiment mired in superstition, one that Puritans would easily link with witchcraft or the devil. In this ceremony, Mary seeks to know the identity of her future husband, surely drawn to such lengths because of her father's adamant disapproval of Brown, and as Carolyn L. Karcher notes, "its purpose is to ascertain whether Brown will become her husband despite her father's interdiction—that is, whether matriarchal nature will prevail over patriarchal culture, primitive sexuality over civilized repression, and female witchcraft over male Puritan ideology" (xxv). Child writes:

Taking a knife from her pocket, she opened a vein in her little arm, and dipping a feather in the blood,¹⁶³ wrote something on a piece of white cloth, which was spread before her...then taking a stick and marking out a large circle on the margin of the stream, she stepped into the magic ring, walked around three times with a measured tread...speaking in a

¹⁶² Carolyn Karcher argues that Child insinuates that Roger Conant's newfound religion is actually inspired by his father-in-law's repudiation of him, stating "With astonishing psychological acumen for a twenty-two-year-old woman living in a pre-Freudian age, Child hints that Conant has mistaken a grudge against his father-in-law for religious inspiration, and that he is unconsciously inflicting on his wife and daughter the psychic wounds that he himself once received as a victim of patriarchal tyranny" (xxiii).

¹⁶³ See Shirley Samuels, "Women, Blood, and Contract," pages 63-64, for an interesting discussion of the symbolic meaning of Mary's blood in what Samuels calls a "marriage contract."

trembling voice... “Whoever’s to claim a husband’s power, Come to me
in the moonlight hour. Whoe’er my bridegroom is to be, Step in the circle
after me.” (13)

Child braids a creepy and gothic¹⁶⁴ scene with the catalyst for the action of her novel, the setting itself in many ways pitted against pure and holy Puritan standards, another element of definance. At this point in a moment of foreshadowing, the Indian Hobomok, a handsome and noble figure, leaps into the circle. Mary screams, and Brown, who had dreamed that Mary was in danger, appear at the site of the divination ceremony as well.¹⁶⁵ Thus, her witchcraft conjures both men that each in his own way represents a way for Mary to defy her father. Karcher notes, “Both [Hobomok and Charles Brown] ... provide a means of defying patriarchal authority, as vested not only in Mary’s father but in the society for which he stands” (xxiv).¹⁶⁶ Later, telling her friend Sally about the supernatural occurrence later, Mary states, “I suppose I must submit to whatever is fore-ordained for me. Folks who have the least to do with love are best off” (21), which echoes Mrs. Oldham’s, her neighbor and mother of her friend Sally, sentiments about marriage as well, who states, “People will marry whom they are fore-ordained to marry” (114). However, in order for a marriage to be “legitimate” in the eyes of Puritan society, it must be one sanctioned by Puritan standards.

Thus Conant’s inability to see Charles Brown, who is surely a fine choice for a mate (intelligent, financially stable, kind, and in love with Mary), as a suitable husband

¹⁶⁴ Characterized by dark themes, the supernatural, and usually uniting the horrific with romance.

¹⁶⁵ See David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England*, pages 87-91 for more about the interpretation of dreams in early America.

¹⁶⁶ See Carl H. Sederholm, “Dividing Religion from Theology in Lydia Maria Child’s *Hobomok*,” pages 557-558 for a discussion of the divination ceremony’s religious implications and meanings.

for his daughter with religion the only objection, not only drives Mary to “devilish” mischief but also sets in motion the events leading to her marriage with Hobomok. As Ezra Tawil points out, “At the level of plot, then, Child forges a causal link between Conant's religious prohibition against Mary's proper mate and her drift toward *Hobomok*” (110). In fact, it is shortly after Mary is “moved to tears” by her father’s condemnation of Charles Brown and Episcopalians that she sneaks off to the forest to perform the divination ceremony. Her father, in this instance, very nearly causes her to head into the woods this day to rebel, for had he not disparaged Charles Brown, she would not have felt so defiant. Had he not forbidden Charles Brown to her, she would not doubt who she would marry—she would know that she and Charles would one day marry because her mother approved and because they loved each other. In fact, her mother’s consent is what concerned Mary the most, not that of her father, which serves as an alternative to traditional patriarchal authority.

Roger Conant’s act, then, highlights the danger of patriarchal injustice, for surely Conant is being unreasonable in his dislike for Charles Brown. And with this stubborn display of power, he, in many ways, might be accused of pushing his daughter toward a “wayward” fate, while also giving her a reason to experiment with witchcraft, one of the ways that young girls of the time could rebel against their Puritan society. Thus, the message here to young readers might be to follow their own desires, that fathers, that the established patriarchy, can indeed be wrong: “the ritual is represented both as an act of mischief issuing from a young girl's overactive imagination and the childish counterpart of her elders' beliefs and mores” (Tawil 110). Taken a step further, even, “Mary's ceremony is therefore less an act of youthful subversion than it is a positive attempt to

suggest a way of life that may have been possible were it not for the exclusionary and dogmatic rhetoric of the errand into the wilderness” (Sederholm 559). In the case of the latter argument, Child indeed uses this ceremony to provide commentary on the ways that seventeenth-century Puritan New England influenced the behaviors of young women and ultimately, social structures such as marriage.

Mary and her mother share a strong bond, which is emphasized throughout the beginning of the novel and which Mary speaks of repeatedly. For example, in addition to disagreeing with her father about religion and about Charles Brown, Mary is actually quite ready to return to England. In fact, she states to her friend Sally, “Indeed, Sally, I’m weary of this wilderness life. My heart yearns for England, and had it not been for my good mother, I would have gladly left Salem to-day” (19). However, Mary’s mother is in declining health and so Mary stays; further, Charles Brown has come from England to Salem primarily for the purpose of being near Mary, whom he met in England when she was living with her grandfather. And while Mary’s mother approves of Charles, her father does not—at one point Conant kicks Charles out of his house, exclaiming “Out with you, and your damnable doctrines, you hypocritical son of a strange woman” (77). It is interesting that Conant connects Charles’s perceived immorality to his mother. It illustrates the always existent connection of maternity and illegitimacy in Puritan America in an attempt to reinforce the traditional patriarchal power structure.

Still, underscoring an alternative to this traditional power structure, Mary and Charles push for Mary’s mother’s approval, for Mary, unwilling to upset her mother, will not marry him without her approval, not that of her father, stating, “Father won’t suffer me to see Charles any where, if he can help it; and if I dared to be disobedient to him, I

wouldn't do it while my poor mother was alive, for I know it would break her heart" (20). So whereas Rowson and Foster highlight poor parental choices as at least part of the reason for the failures of the daughters in their novels, this argument cannot be put forth in *Hobomok* because of the character of Mrs. Conant, who represents fairness and logic, as well as motherly love. Mrs. Mary Conant, then, uses her maternal bond with her daughter to supercede her husband's power. As such, she demonstrates a kind of parenting that is not merely a woman's "tenderness," but one which is reasonable, judicious, and loving—a far better alternative to Conant's angry, antagonistic parenting.

Clearly, Mary is more loyal and more obedient to her mother than her father, a direct affront to the patriarchy of the day when fathers must approve of their daughter's husbands, and daughters should dutifully follow the religion of their fathers and respect their decisions for the family. In fact, Child inverts this order altogether, substituting Mary's mother as the figure of authority in her life, which might also be a reflection of the gradual merging of women in the nineteenth century into the role of disciplinarian in some families.¹⁶⁷ It is here that any attempt to read *Hobomok* as a type of captivity narrative might fail, for Mary is not captive to her father or to his religion at all; in fact, if anything holds Mary captive, it is her mother's illness. Undeniably, Mary makes it quite clear that she might very well be willing to disobey her father and marry Charles Brown if her mother sanctions the match while she is alive and well, for Child is unwilling, it

¹⁶⁷ See John Demos, *Past, Present, and Personal: The Family the Life Course in American History*, pp. 49-58.

seems, to completely put the desires of Mary ahead of all parental approval, as some have argued.¹⁶⁸

In fact, Mary is averse to disobey her mother but is quite willing to disobey her father. Furthermore, readers are aware of Mrs. Conant's past in dealing with her father, as she, like Mary, was all too willing to disobey her father's wishes (as stated earlier, he did not want her to marry Roger Conant, a clear downslide on the social ladder). These choices by both women illustrate elite women's increasing desire for choice and autonomy in their personal lives; they want to be able live a life that they, too, find appealing to some degree. Granted, Child's nineteenth-century perspective dictates that at least one parent should approve of a child's desire, but she argues that the mother is just as capable of providing this sanction as the father is. In fact, in this case, Mary's mother is perhaps even more qualified, for she is more in tune with her child's nature and wishes than her husband. Again Child stresses the willingness of daughters to make their own marriage choices and heed their own wishes and desires for their lives, and she makes a strong argument for mothers to have just as much input regarding the choices of their children as fathers do.¹⁶⁹

However, Mary does not immediately get this chance, for on her death bed, Mrs. Conant tells her husband: "If Brown comes back [from England], you must remember our thwarted love, and deal kindly with Mary. She hath been a good child; and verily the God who had mercy on our unconverted souls, will not forsake her" (108). Interestingly,

¹⁶⁸ See, for example, Nancy F. Sweet's "Dissent and Daughter in *A New England Tale* and *Hobomok*," which argues that Mary defies parental authority to "welcome a new era of Enlightenment into the young republic" (107).

¹⁶⁹ In fact, Nancy M. Theriot provides an interesting discussion of the changing notion of motherhood in the nineteenth century. In particular, see Chapter Four, "Daughters' Brave New World."

it is Mary's mother, not her father, who puts her seal of approval on Mary's marriage match, and at the same time, she removes the necessity for Mary to rebel against her father in this choice, as Roger Conant does in fact make this promise to his wife, perhaps seeing the logic in her plea and the comparison to his own circumstances with his father-in-law. For as she tells Mary, "I loved my husband,—nor have I ever repented that I followed him hither; but oh, Mary, I would not have you suffer as I have suffered, when I have thought of that solitary old man" (75). Mary's mother, then, understands the pain that can accompany the rebellion, and she both wishes that her daughter could avoid this type of guilt and that her husband could come to terms with Mary's choice so that he could continue to be part of her life, unlike her own father.¹⁷⁰ Thus Child makes a strong point here as well about the necessity of logic sometimes overriding religious conviction. However, she makes an even stronger commentary with the power she has granted Mary's mother.

Indeed, the maternal power here soundly trumps that of the father, and in many ways, Mary's mother disrupts the tyrannical father/ defiant daughter paradigm. Mary's mother wins this particular power struggle, albeit she does die. And while some critics see her death as a kind of victimization, it should also be read as an act of enduring power, with her dying wish a strong persuasive tool. Readers recognize this point when Conant is saddened upon hearing the news of Charles Brown's purported death, for "now that there was no hope of making this atonement for his past harshness, he felt more of disappointment than he would have been willing to acknowledge" (119). It seems, in

¹⁷⁰ Paula Kot puts forth an interesting argument for the "oneness" of Mary and her mother, stating "Through her dying request, Mrs. Conant tries to alter Mary's life and insure that her daughter's destiny should not repeat her own, yet in doing so, Mrs. Conant reasserts their essential oneness" (94).

fact, that Roger Conant had the fullest intention of carrying through with his wife's wishes. So while Mrs. Conant might have still been too "English" to survive in America, she can certainly take measures to make sure her daughter is fully prepared, to make sure her daughter can fully adapt to this new land. Furthermore, it is important to remember that it was she who ultimately convinces Roger Conant to sanction the union between Charles Brown and his daughter, even though he has to wait until much later to do so because it suggests that she did have some kind of control in the way that she and her husband parented their daughter.

Ultimately, then, it is Mrs. Conant, not Mr. Conant, who deems religious difference unimportant to marriage. Along these lines Karcher states, "the rebellion of [Conant's] wife and daughter illustrates how the cycle of patriarchal tyranny can be arrested" (xxiv).¹⁷¹ Most scholarship emphasizes that Mrs. Conant was "weak" and "emaciated," indeed on the brink of death physically. However, her mental faculties were still strong, and it is she, not Roger Conant, who has more impact upon and more power over her daughter. The mother/daughter bond clearly takes precedence over the wishes/and or demands of Roger Conant, and the two women are able to enjoy their bond outside of patriarchal rules.

With the death of Mary's mother, however, Mary loses much of her ammunition against her father; however, she still readily dissents when given the opportunity, using her own judgment without consideration of her father's wishes. Further, it is Roger

¹⁷¹ See Stephanie Smith, *Conceived by Liberty: Maternal Figures and Nineteenth-Century American Literature* for more on the role of Mrs. Mary Conant in *Hobomok*.

Conant's unreasonable, hasty actions that push her to begin making her own choices. Her decision to marry Hobomok after Charles is presumed dead in a shipwreck, the section of the novel that receives the bulk of the critical attention, is the ultimate act of rebellion in the novel. Unable to bear all the attention of the villagers after Charles "dies," Mary retreats to her mother's grave for solace, but she is in an extremely vulnerable, mentally unstable state: "there was a partial derangement of Mary's faculties. A bewilderment of despair that almost amounted to insanity...there was chaos in Mary's mind... 'I will be your wife, Hobomok, if you love me'" (121). To the astonishment and horror of Mary's and Hobomok's respective communities, the two indeed marry in a traditional Indian ceremony but not without one more unconscious act of encouragement from Conant. When Mary returns home after proposing to Hobomok but before marrying him, she seeks comfort from her Bible and reflects upon her father's late kindness to her and begins to reexamine her decision. But when her father discovers her with the text (one that Charles Brown had given her), he angrily grabs the book from her and quite nearly throws it in the fire. "That single act," Child notes, "decided the fluctuating fate of his child" (122). Thus again, Roger Conant's action is the catalyst for Mary's rebellion.

In fact, this is the point many critics emphasize, for it overwhelmingly suggests that Mary did not, in fact, choose to marry Hobomok at all, but was forced, for various reasons to "go Native" as one critic not-so-delicately states. For example, Tawil posits that "[the novel] argues that Mary could never really desire such a union, for only a formidable obstacle was capable of diverting her natural desire and delivering her into the arms of an Indian" (111), while Paula Kot takes this line of reasoning even further and suggests that Mary marries Hobomok not out of rebellion against her father, but against

her dead mother in an effort to negate the many similarities her life shares with that of her mother. This particular reading by Kot, however, does not acknowledge the strong bond that the mother and daughter enjoyed. By suggesting that Mary would desire to defy her mother as well as her father, Kot refuses to give any power to and all but ignores the maternal politics that are displayed in this novel. In fact, Mary's strong bond with her mother could be one way that she understands and eventually displays her own individual strength. As the fact that these two women share the same name suggests, Mary is an extension of her mother and thus is quite capable of building upon the authority that her mother has already demonstrated.¹⁷²

Furthermore, it is at this point that an examination of the way that Child draws the character of Hobomok becomes helpful, as he is, by all accounts, nearly perfect. Physically, Hobomok is very handsome; Child first introduces him as "tall and athletic" with "healthy cheeks" (16), and she later refers to him as "cast in nature's noblest mould. He was one of the finest specimens of elastic, vigorous elegance of proportion, to be found among his tribe" (36). His manner was that of "haughty, dignified reserve" (36), his language was "brief, figurative, and poetic" (121) and his nature was "unwarped by the artifices of civilized life" (121). He is, in every sense, the sentimentalized archetype of the "noble savage." In fact, Hobomok had always been successful in gaining the attention of Mary, and he loved her. Directly prior to her proposal to Hobomok, Mary considers "the idolatry he had always paid her" (121). When examining his qualities, Hobomok does not seem as puzzling a choice as many nineteenth-century readers would

¹⁷² Theriot's discussion of mothers and daughter is again useful here. Through her mother's initial displays of authority in her marriage, her daughter can now build upon that effort, which provides an expanded life view. See Theriot, pages 78-79.

make him out to be, with one exception: his race. Indeed, the fact that Child marries a white woman and an Indian (outside of the captivity narrative) is enterprising, regardless of the way their marriage came to be, because she joins two races that were in many ways struggling to coexist in the nineteenth century.¹⁷³ Thus while the scholarship focusing on the implications of the intermarriage, the “reasons” why Mary would marry Hobomok, and whether or not this marriage symbolizes the coming together of the two races is important, but these are not the only aspects to consider about this union. What happens to Mary after the marriage stands as an equally important avenue to explore, for she becomes a mother, and this single act is what stands as the redemptive quality for her unregulated behavior (interracial marriage without her father’s approval).

When Mary marries Hobomok, it is clear that she is suffering from some sort of mental incapacity, as Child stresses her instability again and again: “derangement of faculties,” “bewilderment of despair,” “insanity,” “chaos of mind,” “frenzied,” “listless,” and “stupefied state” are just some of the phrases that Child uses to describe her. But she also couples Mary’s mental state with a nearly perfect mate in Hobomok, who is by all accounts a “good” husband. And eventually, even though Mary might have been deranged when she proposed to Hobomok, she comes to be comfortable in her role as his wife, as evidenced by the passage that begins the discussion of *Hobomok* in this chapter:

Desolate as Mary’s lot might seem, it was not without its alleviations...
Hobomok continued the same tender reverence, he had always
evinced...So much love could not but awaken gratitude; and Mary by
degrees gave way to its influence, until she welcomed his return with

¹⁷³ It must also be noted that Mary does bring her “white privilege” to the marriage, however.

something like affection... she knew her own nation looked upon her as lost and degraded... and even he was generally avoided by his former friends... Every wound of this kind, every insult which her husband courageously endured for her sake, added romantic fervor to her increasing affection... before two years passed away, she became the mother of a hopeful son. (136)

Thus Child condenses the first three years of their marriage into one passage, ending Mary's transformation from grief-stricken and insane to comfortable if not happy, even, with the birth of her son.

In a sense, then, her defiance comes full circle—not only has she married outside of her race, she has also given birth to a mixed-race child, which Leland Person suggests responds to the fear of miscegenation during the time.¹⁷⁴ However, Mary's status as mother serves also to legitimize the marriage. And Mary very much views her marriage as legitimate. When her father, for example, writes her a letter begging her not to view her marriage as lawful because of her incapacitated mental state, Mary “could not persuade herself that her marriage vow to the Indian was any less sacred, than any other voluntary promise” (136). Thus Mary finds herself not only caring for Hobomok, but loving him as well; she tells Sally, “I speak truly when I say that every day I live with that kind, noble-hearted creature, the better I love him” (137). The fact that she refers to him as “creature” rather than “man,” however, might hint that Mary's feelings are still unresolved. But her actions toward him seem to indicate that she honestly does love

¹⁷⁴ See Leland Person, “The American Eve: Miscegenation and a Feminist Frontier Fiction,” page 672.

Hobomok, romantically. He is, after all, the father of her son, and she says nice and loving things about him.

It is also important to note that these words spoken to Sally are the result of a particularly sweet scene between Hobomok and his son, demonstrating not only Hobomok's affection for Mary, but also his affection for his son and his status as a "good" and "loving" father. As Mary watches Hobomok interact with their son in following scene, it represents something that might greatly affect Mary given her relationship with her father: "He caught up the infant, and placing his little feet in the centre of his hand, held him high above his head. 'My boy, my brave hunter's boy,' said he, and pressing him in his arms he half suffocated him with caresses" (137). Hobomok is capable of the kindness, the gentleness that her stern Puritan father is not. Again, Child takes even more power away from the patriarchal constructs of Puritan society, for nearly any reader would agree that Hobomok's parenting skills seem better than those of Roger Conant. Child, then, once again provides her readers with an alternative to the traditional form of patriarchy they are accustomed to seeing from Puritan America.¹⁷⁵

No longer has she just married Hobomok out of grief or out of "insanity." She and Hobomok can now qualify as a family, and their son symbolizes not merely miscegenation, but their love and affection for each other, which might be more frightening in some ways to the nineteenth-century reader. When she gives birth to her son, "Mary looked on the little being, which was 'bone of her bone, and flesh of her

¹⁷⁵ She in essence argues that women and Indians have a place in the power structure as well, something that in fact was highly debated during the nineteenth century and a reason why women and Indians seem to be linked in the literature of the time. Gender and race disrupt conventional forms of patriarchy, bringing new voice and perspectives to age-old traditions.

flesh' ... [and] felt more love for the innocent object, than she thought she should ever again experience" (136). Child takes pains to downplay the miscegenation, hinting that Hobomok, over the course of his marriage to Mary, has even become more "white" than "Indian." For example, Sally states, "I always thought he was the best Indian I ever knew and within these three years, he has altered so much, that he seems almost like an Englishman" (137). No evidence in the novel seems to support this assertion, however, for Hobomok still lives as an Indian would, he still speaks in the same halted, "poetic" English that he has the entire novel, and he is still referred to in the novel with terms varying from "Indian," to "noble savage," to "the dark man." If anything, it is Mary who has embraced the "Indian" way of live, as she lives in a wigwam and Hobomok still spends his time doing what he has always done.

Mary has not carried Hobomok into her world—he has carried her into his. Other than receiving occasional guests from Salem and regularly seeing her friend Sally, it does seem that Mary has fully abandoned her former lifestyle to a large degree. Once interested in arts and society back in England, she now believes that lifestyle is no longer available to her. As such, she even admits to her father that she has no use for the fortune that her grandfather left her upon his death and for him to appropriate it, telling him "she should probably never be in a situation to enjoy it" (136). It seems clear that Mary has resigned herself to the fact that she will never again belong to her Puritan community. In fact, the novel states that Mary "knew that her own nation looked upon her as lost and degraded; and, what was far worse, her own heart echoed back the charge" (135). Further, she has not even returned to the town since she and Hobomok married, which

also points to the potential shame that Mary might feel in an “illegitimate” marriage to a Native American man.

It is quite clear, though, that Mary does not want to return to her former life. Charles Brown is gone, her mother is gone, and she has nothing there. With Hobomok, she has a husband who loves her and a child to dote upon. And with her child, she can now have access to a community of mothers. Sally, for example, is never hesitant to bring her own child to play with Mary’s child at her wigwam. She and Sally are bonded by their shared maternity, and even though Mary might be isolated from her former society, she has this new circle to which she belongs, which likely works to prevent any feelings of isolation she might experience. In fact, Mary’s son allows her to embrace a new role. She is no longer daughter to Roger Conant—she is a mother to a son.

Child, in this sense, has revised the story of sanctioned, traditional forms of Puritan motherhood, in that Mary displays strong resistance to patriarchy in her choice to produce a child with Hobomok within a marriage legitimized by Indian tradition, not by Puritan law. As such, she experiences her maternity outside patriarchal bounds, and the birth of her child protects her marriage to Hobomok, even legitimizing it to some degree, as it allows her entry into a maternal circle that escapes patriarchal constraints. For example, Sally Collier’s visits to Mary undoubtedly strengthen the bond that might have vanished after Mary abandons Puritan society. Sally and Mary no longer have a community in common, nor do they have similar lives. But they are now both mothers, and their friendship can remain strong through their maternal association, one that

requires no patriarchal regulation. It is in this way that Mary's motherhood becomes a shield against Puritan patriarchy.¹⁷⁶

However, Hobomok reveals that there is one part of his wife's previous life that she cannot fully forget, that she prays for Charles Brown in her sleep (138). In fact, he discloses this information to Charles Brown when he meets him in the forest after Brown had returned. When Hobomok finds that Brown is alive after all, he decides that he must do the "noble" thing and leave, so that Mary and Charles can be together, for he knows that Charles Brown is her true love, telling himself, "She was first his. Mary loves him better than she does me...The sacrifice must be made" (139). Therefore, he leaves a note at the Collier residence that qualifies as a kind of legal divorce contract, which demonstrates that he, as well as Mary, views the marriage as legal. He then silently observes his wife and son one last time, unbeknownst to them, and he leaves forever, literally as his young son asks when his father will be home. Thus Child, in overt sentimental fashion, makes way for Charles and Mary to marry and extinguishes the "noble savage" Hobomok forever from Mary's life, from the village, and the novel. Hobomok gives his farewell, stating that he "will go far off among some of the red men in the east. They will dig him a grave, and Mary may sing the marriage song in the wigwam of the Englishman" (139). And as Tawil explains, "Once the Indian has removed himself, the newly constituted couple can return to the settlement and receive Mr. Conant's blessing" (112).¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ We must also consider Mary's friend Sally's motherhood too. Sally's motherhood gives her access to a more expansive world through her fellowship with Mary.

¹⁷⁷ Just as the "noble savage" has made way for the "white man" on the continent...in many ways, this is a clear allegory for Manifest Destiny and the "vanishing Indian."

But in all reality, the couple does not need his blessing, for they by all accounts had already received it from Mary's mother. Charles had already proposed to Mary before even speaking to Roger Conant at all; indeed, Conant is not even mentioned in their reunion. The one thing that does need to be resolved, still, is the fact that Mary and Hobomok do have a child, known as "little Hobomok," whose father has vanished into the wilderness. Charles, however, has a quick and easy answer: "He shall be my own boy" (149). And that he most definitely was, for he quickly assimilated into white culture, and his "Indian appellation was silently omitted" (150). He ultimately graduated from Cambridge and furthered his education in England, while his father was "seldom spoken of" (150). Furthermore, he was "a peculiar favorite with his grandfather" (150), which could function as Child's way of stressing that Puritan patriarchy can be conformed. Mary's child, though not initially recognized as "legitimate" because he was born in a marriage not sanctioned by Puritan law, has by the end of the novel been embraced by even the most rigid examples of the Puritan authority system.

As Nancy Sweet has noted, "Mary's New World experience—epitomized by her marriage to a Native American—transforms her aristocratic bearing into qualities of humility, simplicity, and an abiding regard for the beauty and spiritual power of nature" (116). As such, it is clear that the novel's strength rests upon the notion of Mary's union with Hobomok. Mary makes a transformation that could not have happened without her marriage to Hobomok: she becomes "American," leaving her longing for England behind her. And the key to her understanding that she must stay in America rests with her son, the son that legitimized her marriage to Hobomok by demonstrating, in flesh and blood,

the real love that the couple shared.¹⁷⁸ When Charles, for example, asks her if she will return to England with him, she states, “I cannot go to England. My boy would disgrace me, and I never will leave him; for love to him is the only way that I can now repay my debt of gratitude” (148). The disgrace that Mary speaks of is strongly connected to illegitimacy, as her marriage to Hobomok is in one sense an illegitimate one, since it was an Indian-style marriage and not one sanctioned under Puritanism. Further, this debt that she speaks of is to Hobomok, who provided Mary with the avenue to reform the traditional authorizing system in Puritan America. Her status as mother now controls her choices, and Mary makes it clear that her priority is the well being and happiness of her child, just as her own mother might have stated.

When she returns to her white community with her white husband and her mixed-race child, and the community and her father welcome her back with open arms. Roger Conant is finally able to fulfill his promise to his wife, and he blesses Mary and Charles’s union. The novel ends with Mary still making choices that are best for her and still having control over her life; this time, however, her choices are not questioned. She knows what is best for her child, and Charles does not disagree, and in the end, Mary displays autonomy in the marriage state. Her early defiance is now forgotten and has merged into something closer to independence, even as a married mother. Yet she also manages to uphold traditional values as well, as she marries her true love, raises her son with this man who takes him as his own, and builds a home close to her father. In doing so, she demonstrates individuality but reinforces traditional mores. Child revises the seventeenth-century Puritan experience to reflect that of women and the struggle for

¹⁷⁸ This line certainly echoes the poetry of Anne Bradstreet, who is worried that her literary progeny will disgrace her with their publication in England.

autonomy rather than focusing on the largely male story that had already been told. With this revision, and with the success of Mary in the end of the novel, she rewrites the story of woman in the seventeenth century to impact those living in the nineteenth century. Matriarchy serves as an alternative to the traditional authorizing system apparent in Puritan patriarchy.

The Scarlet Letter

In the midst, and in the centre of all eyes, we see the Woman. She stands loftily before her judges, with a determined brow, and, unknown to herself, there is a flash of carnal pride half hidden in her eyes, as she surveys the many learned and famous men whom her doctrines have put in fear.¹⁷⁹

The young woman...took the baby on her arm, and, with a burning blush, and yet a haughty smile, and a glance that would not be abashed, looked around at her townspeople and neighbors...Knowing her part well, she ascended a flight of wooden steps, and was thus displayed to the surrounding multitude, at about the height of a man's shoulders above the street...the Governor, and several of his counsellors, a judge, a general, and the ministers of the town; all of whom...[were] looking down upon the platform...The unhappy culprit sustained herself as best a woman might, under the heavy weight of a thousand unrelenting eyes, all fastened upon her...¹⁸⁰

A striking connection in this dissertation is that between Hester Prynne and Anne Hutchinson, as these two passages by Hawthorne highlight, as does the mention of the rosebush that “had sprung up under the footsteps of the sainted Ann Hutchinson, as she entered the prison-door” in the Prison-Door scene (37).¹⁸¹ Both are judged, and while both seem to welcome, in a way, this judgment, each woman also suffers from it as well.

¹⁷⁹ Nathaniel Hawthorne, “Mrs. Hutchinson.” 1830.

¹⁸⁰ Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, 1850.

¹⁸¹ David Leverenz suggests that the rosebush symbolizes woman's ability to triumphantly survive over her towering, glowering elders. See page 556 of “Mrs. Hawthorne's Headache.”

Nonetheless, Hawthorne clearly derives some inspiration from Hutchinson for his character Hester, who displays strength under adversity, much like her real-life doppelganger. But while Hutchinson's defense came in the form of speech, part of Hester's defense comes in the form of her silence—silence when accusations and insults are thrown at her and silence when she is pressed for information. However, while Hutchinson's "guilt" is made evident through her "monstrous birth," Hester derives her main defense from her status as mother and the way she chooses to raise her daughter Pearl. One might expect her illegitimate daughter to be a source of shame or an avenue by which she would continue to be attacked. After all, Mary Conant refuses to go to England with Charles, stating her biracial son would "disgrace" her (Child 148). Hester, however, chooses to mother on her own terms, stepping beyond the patriarchal rules set down before her. In doing so, she builds a strong wall of defense and as Leland S. Person suggests, she covertly engages in a power struggle with the men by refusing to do what they want her to do.¹⁸² In fact, one could argue that the fact that Hester refuses to speak threatens the foundation of her Puritan society, an ironic notion considering that women really were not encouraged to speak publically.

The early Market-Place scene sets the stage for Hester's forbidden act, as her detractors stand by to get a glimpse of her in a crowd that Elbert calls "matriophobic" (177). Significantly, some of her harshest critics come in the form of other women: a "hard-featured dame of fifty" calls Hester a "hussy"; another "autumnal matron" suggests that the "brand of a hot iron" should be placed on the forehead of the "the naughty

¹⁸² Leland S. Person, in "Hester's Revenge: The Power of Silence in *The Scarlet Letter*", discusses Hester's silence in the matter of the father of Pearl as a weapon against patriarchy and as a way to engage the powerful men in the community in a battle of wills.

baggage”; and the “ugliest and most pitiless” woman there argues that Hester has “brought shame upon us all, and ought to die” (38-39). The only sympathy Hester has in this group of women turns out to be a younger woman who herself has a young child with her. Indeed, it seems that the only understanding and empathy Hester receives is from another young mother, as it is likely that these other women mentioned are beyond childbearing age and are no longer actively mothering. As such, Elbert points out that they “know no other way of gaining power in this closed society than to be as critical as their men in the persecution of one of their sister...in trying to come to terms with their powerlessness of woman in patriarchy, they have denied...their maternal privilege . . . by becoming more male, more hard, than the toughest patriarch” (176). Women do seem to be Hester’s greatest adversaries.

When considering that the only woman in the crowd who displayed any kind of concern toward Hester is a young mother who has a small child gripping her hand, the fact that motherhood does function as a type of shield becomes more apparent. She is bold enough to tell the older women, “O, peace, neighbors, peace! Do not let her hear you! Not a stitch in that embroidered letter, but she has felt it in her heart” (41). However, this same young mother also dies in the novel, for it is mentioned later in the novel that Hester had made burial-robe for “the youngest and only compassionate” woman from the group of women who were standing outside the prison-door when she was first released (156). The rest of her female critics are alive and still stand by in judgment, participating in patriarchy’s hegemony. This young woman probably did not have an illegitimate child, but she defends Hester’s actions in an attempt to humanize her, rather than focusing upon Hester’s “sin.” That this young mother dies, albeit quietly and with barely a mention,

could be linked to the fact that women who show defiance do, indeed, wind up dead, like Charlotte in *Charlotte Temple*, for example. Yet Hawthorne clearly allows Hester to live, which sets his novel, and the character of Hester, apart from that particular paradigm. Hester, therefore, demonstrates a particular kind of strength that is uncommon in female protagonists.

How, then, to shape the character of Hester as the embodiment of strength? Hawthorne does not give her masculine qualities. Indeed she is very feminine and described as “tall, with a figure of perfect elegance on a large scale. She had dark and abundant hair, so glossy that threw off the sunshine with a gleam...she was lady-like, too, after the manner of feminine gentility of those days...” (40). She does not attempt to vocalize any kind of perceived power or participate in the public domain, instead choosing to remain mostly silent, as Person argues. In fact, David Leverenz has noted that “[Hester] avoids any struggle for public power except to preserve her conventional role as mother” (560). While labeling Hester’s motherhood “conventional” may be a bit of a misnomer, Leverenz’s observation that Hester does not compete for power in the male-dominated public sphere is particularly apt because actually, she does quite the opposite. In fact, Hester eventually becomes a counselor and confidant for the other young women in the community, which underscores her importance to women trying to make sense of their changing responsibilities in their society. Hester becomes respected and admired for a kind of knowledge that women did not typically have access to.

Much like Mary Conant in *Hobomok*, Hester chooses to live on the margins of town (and society) and refuses to engage in any kind of association with the townspeople other than her sewing. Perhaps it is this very distance that Hester establishes that

becomes a catalyst for her strength. Hester's source of strength, however, should not be solely attributed to her refusal to participate in a conformist manner. Instead, one must look to Hester's daughter Pearl for an additional source of her strength. In fact, in the same way that Mary Conant uses her motherhood to adapt to her situation, Hester uses Pearl as a weapon of sorts, as well as a source of defense, against the patriarchal voices that continually condemn her. Hester uses Pearl to forge a new identity; rather than internalizing her status as "criminal" or "sinner," Hester embraces her motherhood and derives power, a silent, feminine kind of power that her detractors do not and cannot fully understand.

In "The Elf-Child and the Minister," the custody battle reveals that Hester is defined by her maternity, not by her sin. Governor Bellingham threatens to remove Pearl from Hester, suggesting that the young child would be better off in another family where she could be "clad soberly, disciplined strictly, and instructed in the truths of heaven and earth" (75). Hester, however, argues vehemently, that she can use her mistakes to teach Pearl and that in fact, Pearl is better off because of her mother's mistakes. Hester states, as she points to the emblem on her chest: "this badge [her scarlet letter] hath taught me, -- it daily teaches me,--it is teaching me at this moment,--lessons whereof my child may be the wiser and better, albeit they can profit nothing to myself" (75). Hester, therefore, merges her identity as "sinner" with that of "mother." She, perhaps better than anyone, can teach her daughter the dangers of sin, and as Elbert notes, "The original sexual transgression...has given way to the focus of the narrative, maternity" (195). It is clearer during this custody battle than at any other point in the novel that Hester is defined by her

maternity, not by her sin. In many ways, in fact, Hester merges her identity as “sinner” with that of “mother.”

At this moment, Hester continues to redefine the “A,” which now represents the knowledge that she can impart to her daughter as she raises her alone.¹⁸³ Nina Baym asserts that with the existence of Pearl, “The A ... means only maternity: the complex, bewildering, and ambiguous set of events which have set Hester’s course for life are ultimately reduced to the ‘sin’ of having given birth to a child” (23-24). However, while the “A” indeed represents Hester’s motherhood, I would argue that Hester successfully navigates away from the emphasis on sin and rather embraces her role as the mother to Pearl and the ability that she can bring to this role. While Hester has remained silent for the majority of the novel in dealing with the society’s power structure, she is vocal in this instance because she is speaking about motherhood, a role in which she has completely embraced and role in which she has found a source of strength and power.

The Governor perhaps recognizes Hester’s authority, so when he proceeds with his “custody” questions, he moves away from examining Hester and turns his attention to Pearl, asking her “who made thee?” (75). Pearl’s reply that she was not made at all but rather had been “plucked by her mother off the bush of wild roses that grew by the prison-door” did not please the Governor. Nonetheless, Pearl’s response highlights the tension that single motherhood brings to this novel. As Elbert argues, “The worst sin against patriarchy is to bear a child and not disclose the identity of the father...Hester’s

¹⁸³ By this point in the novel, Hester has begun to make a positive name for herself in her community, even as she remained on the margins: “As is apt to be the case when a person stands out in any prominence before the community, and at the same time, interferes neither with public nor individual interest and convenience, a species of general regard had ultimately grown up in reference to Hester Prynne” (Hawthorne 105).

single motherhood is one of those peculiar feminine mysteries that men have made taboo because it robs them of their power” (179).¹⁸⁴ Hester had long been punished for her sexual transgression, having spent time in prison and bearing the emblem of the “A”; therefore, this perceived “custody trial” is condemning Hester’s maternity. Of course, Pearl is a precocious child who does not fit within the norms of the archetypal Puritan child, but Pearl must be this way. She must be able to capture the attention of both the readers and the characters in the novel as someone whose existence cannot be denied, which supports Baym’s assertion that “we cannot argue that Pearl has a right to be, and hence cannot fault the mother for bringing her into existence” (23). Dimmesdale himself echoes this argument in his effort to convince the Governor to allow Hester to keep Pearl. He states, “God gave her the child, and gave her, too, an instinctive knowledge of its nature and requirements, --both seemingly so peculiar,--which no other mortal being can possess” (77).

Pearl is the source of strength that has enabled Hester during the course of the novel. As such, the mother and the child are hardly ever apart during the entire novel, which highlights Pearl’s essentialness to Hester. In fact, it does seem that Pearl is a physical and spiritual extension of her mother. Consider, for example, that the only time during the novel when Hester appears to lose her calm, serene demeanor is during this custody battle; in fact, Hester displays a desperateness that is startling, as she begs to keep her child: “God gave me the child!...She is my happiness!—she is my torture, none the less! Pearl keeps me here in life! Pearl punishes me too! See ye not, she is the scarlet

¹⁸⁴ This idea can be strongly connected to Bradstreet’s publication of her poetry as well as Hutchinson’s public participation in the theological debates within her community.

letter, only capable of being loved, and so endowed with a million-fold the power of retribution for my sin? Ye shall not take her! I will die first!" (76).

It is perhaps this poignant scene that prompts Joanne Feit Diehl to argue that Hester's maternity "imprisons" her as it protects her (665); similarly, Baym argues that Hester's "confinement within her motherhood" is a "high price [to] pay" (23). However, I would argue that Hester derives power from her seclusion within her motherhood, her "imprisonment." In many ways, Hester's maternity forced her to the margins of society where she was able to make choices independent of the dominant society, choices which include those related to Pearl and how she raises her. It is in this way that she denies any kind of label that seventeenth-century women often had; she is not a conventional mother, a loving wife, a widow, or a witch—she is her own unique person, and it is only her single motherhood, her illegitimacy, that allows her to live her life in this way. Another noteworthy aspect of Hester's character is that she ultimately garners the respect of her entire community as well, with Hawthorne carefully giving her admirable qualities that help establish this regard.

Hester seems to take pride in her abilities as a mother, and she displays confidence in her capability to raise Pearl alone, which sets her apart from other mothers and other women. David Leverenz posits that "as a mother, she [Hester] has to nurture conventional womanhood, in herself as well as her daughter" (559). And while no doubt Hawthorne must think carefully about the way Hester chooses to raise Pearl, Hester and Pearl are not like the rest of their society and are certainly far from "conventional." And rather than fight against this fact, Hester seems to embrace it.¹⁸⁵ She knows that Pearl is

¹⁸⁵ This, perhaps, is what sets the character of Hester apart from the other mothers in the story.

different, yet she typically encourages it. For example, Hester dresses Pearl in a way that sets her apart from other children: “Her mother, in contriving the child’s garb, had allowed the gorgeous tendencies of her imagination their full play; arraying her in a crimson velvet tunic, of a peculiar cut, abundantly embroidered with fantasies and flourishes of gold thread...it was the scarlet letter in another form; the scarlet letter endowed with life!” (69). And when Pearl attacks other children in town who fling mud at her, Hester quietly approves. Further, Hester allows Pearl to run, dance, shout, and engage in imaginary games. In essence, Hester raises Pearl the way she wants to raise her, without regard to the conventional rules established by a patriarchal society.

Indeed, as Baym asserts, “Pearl is her mother’s child only. Though society and Hester are aware that a man participated in the act, Pearl has no sense of this necessity and hers is the view that the reader is forced to adopt. That is, we know that Hester has had a lover but we never really know that Hester has a father...Matriarchy prevails” (23). Hester maneuvers her sin into something that allows her to embrace independence in a way that few women could in her society, and as Elbert argues once Hester is “secure in her positions as a mother, she becomes self-reliant” (186). She takes the meaning of the scarlet letter and embodies it to such a degree that it becomes not only representative of herself but also her child. Much is made of the fact that Hester refuses remove the emblem, but really she cannot ever remove it. It remains part of her being, part of who she is and who Pearl is. If the emblem is removed, then the meanings which Hester has molded into it would in turn disappear.

And in fact, her fellow townspeople also come to view the scarlet letter differently as well. In Chapter 13, more than seven years after Hester emerges from the prison

cradling Pearl, Hawthorne writes, “The letter was the symbol of her calling... They said it meant Able; so strong was Hester Prynne, with a woman’s strength” (106).¹⁸⁶ As the meaning behind the emblem changed, so too did Hester’s physical appearance: “Even the attractiveness of her person had undergone a similar change... It was a sad transformation, too, that her rich and luxuriant hair had either been cut off, or was so completely hidden by a cap, that not shining lock of it [could be seen]... Some attribute had departed from her, the permanence of which had been essential to keep her a woman” (107). Her physical description, thus, has changed from that at the beginning of the novel when she “had dark and abundant hair, so glossy that it threw off the sunshine with a gleam” and she her beauty was “astonishing” (40). However, when juxtaposed against the description of Pearl, it becomes clear that Hester has transferred her beauty to her daughter, that very beauty which may have been perceived as a kind of danger: “We have spoken of Pearl’s rich and luxuriant beauty; a beauty which shone with deep and vivid tints; a bright complexion, eyes possessing intensity both of depth and glow, and hair already of a deep, glossy brown, and which, in after years, would be nearly akin to black” (69).

In this sense, then, Pearl and Hester are not only constant companions but also doubles, as are the two Mary Conants in *Hobomok*. Hester becomes less sexualized and more maternal with her beauty being minimized because she, throughout the course of the novel, has moved away from the thoughts of passion to thoughts centered on her motherhood; Pearl has come to dominate her life out of necessity, and she has other things that she must now consider. For example, Hester often imagines (hopelessly,

¹⁸⁶ Sacvan Bercovitch suggests that the “the office of the scarlet letter” (Hawthorne, Chapter 13) is to bring Hester and her community together.

according to narrator) her society being “torn down, and built up anew” with men’s nature being “essentially modified [so that] woman can be allowed to assume what seems a fair and suitable position” (Hawthorne 108). But it does not mean that Hester has denied passion altogether, for she has transferred that quality to her daughter. In fact, Elbert argues, “From the beginning, Pearl seems an extension of her mother: we see her first as an infant at Hester’s breast, receiving sustenance and, with that, Hester’s wildness of spirit” (196).

The extension completes itself as Pearl grows into a young woman who is physically, spiritually, emotionally, and intellectually similar (nearly identical) to her mother. Thus Hester and Pearl’s bond displays the power of the maternal politics in this *The Scarlet Letter*. Hester’s mothering decisions mold Pearl into a character who stands out, who is necessary, and who supersedes the circumstances of her birth. She raises her daughter on her own and on her own terms, without the need of male intervention; Pearl, in turn, ultimately does not feel the need to have any kind of father at all. And they both survive beyond the realm of patriarchal influence, with Hester’s unregulated maternity serving as their shield.¹⁸⁷

It is particularly important to compare the character of Hester to the other mothers featured in this dissertation because she succeeds where the others struggle. Anne Hutchinson and Hester Prynne share many similarities, yet Hester remains silent while Hutchinson voices her dissent. Therefore, Hester’s isolationist tendencies likely helped her situation. Hester Prynne might have easily wound up in the situation that Rebekah

¹⁸⁷ In the nineteenth century, however, the cult of true womanhood imprisoned women just as relentlessly as the Puritan rigidity of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. A woman like the character of Hester, therefore, really cannot be found in the nineteenth century either.

Chamblit did, but Hester perhaps was more equipped to bear the shame. Furthermore, Hester had a sure way to support herself and her daughter with her exceptional sewing abilities, whereas Chamblit may have been concerned because she had no real way to support a child on her own. Comparing Hester to Eliza and Charlotte is also telling; unlike these two women, Hester was not at the mercy of a man whom she had to rely on to take care of her. Hawthorne, then, can see the tools with which he must equip Hester in order for her to become the strong, surviving character. She must not be too vocal, lest the Puritan authority will silence her. She must have a legal, respected way to support herself and her child. Finally, she cannot rely on a male character for any kind of support; rather, she must be able to survive on her own.

EPILOGUE

“A” IS NOT ALWAYS FOR EXCELLENCE

A few weeks ago as I was walking down the hallway of my college after making some quick copies, a colleague stopped me to tell me that she had just put a catalog on my desk. “It’s a literature catalog,” she told me. “I thought you might want to look through it.” As I briefly thumbed through the pages, I saw that the catalog was geared toward teachers of junior high and high school students, not college, and I tossed it into my recycle bin and forgot about it. Later that day, however, I happened to glance at the catalog, which had opened when I tossed it in the bin, and an image with the letter “A” caught my eye. Intrigued, I retrieved the catalog from the bin to get a better look. Sure enough, a poster for *The Scarlet Letter* was staring back at me. It was located in a section that was selling posters for novels, modeled after the traditional movie posters that we might see at our local Cineplex.

Each novel featured in the catalog had some kind of image representing the text, with a cheesy plug line that previewed the novel. There was *Oedipus the King* (“You can’t change your destiny”); *The Tell-Tale Heart* (“Obsession can be deadly”); *Romeo and Juliet* (“The ultimate family feud, only this time...it’s not a game”); and *Animal Farm* (“Something’s gone terribly wrong on the ole homestead”), among others. And yes, there

was *The Scarlet Letter*, enticing young readers with the melodramatic tag, “‘A’ is not always for excellence.” *The Scarlet Letter* poster features a black background, with a white “A” prominently placed in the middle of the page. The “A” is draped with red fabric curtaining around it, almost taking on a blood-like quality. The top of the poster displays the “stars” of the novel: “Hester Prynne, Pearl [interestingly, Pearl is given no last name], Roger Chillingworth, Rev. Author Dimmesdale, Gov. Bellingham, and Rev. John Wilson.” The bottom of the poster tells potential readers that the book is rated “M,” with the warning, “This is a deep, deep book.” As I sat at my desk looking at the poster, amused, I began to think about the way that *The Scarlet Letter* was described in this publication. These tag lines, clearly written with the millennial audience in mind, nonetheless attempt to encompass the main idea of each novel for potential readers. Naturally, *The Scarlet Letter* poster highlights the fact that Hester’s symbolic “A” is representative of something negative and unregulated, something perhaps even dangerous judging from the blood-like characteristics of the poster.

When I see a woman’s status as mother highlighted in some way, whether in politics, entertainment, or in the lives of my own friends and family, I take note. For example, a recent cover of a popular women’s magazine featured the actress Jaime Pressley, who is on the NBC show *My Name is Earl*. Beside her smiling face, the magazine blared out to me in the grocery store, “Jaime’s in great shape after recently giving birth to her son. She’s flying solo, but don’t call her a single mother.” The first questions that came to my mind were, “Why can’t we call her a single mother? Does this term now carry a bad connotation for some reason?” In the interview, Pressley indeed states that she does not want to be viewed as a “single mother,” even though she is in fact

single and is a mother. First of all, she says, she and her son's father, while not a couple, share equal parenting responsibility and have a "great amount of respect for one another." OK, I thought, but why isn't she a single mother? Pressley gets to this later in the interview, when she further comments that she doesn't like the label of single mother because it implies that it is not natural for her to parent on her own. "I don't like what this term represents to people," Pressley states. And she leaves it at that. What exactly does this term represent to people? Many possibilities exist, as we have seen in this dissertation, such as strength, love, and resilience on the one hand, and poverty, sin, violence, crime, and isolation on the other hand.

Indeed, Pressley might be referring to the fact that the label "single mother" can have a negative connotation, mostly related to class, I think. But single mothers make the news in negative ways sometimes, as well. Unconventional motherhood (in this case, criminal motherhood) is sure to garner attention from the society that produces it. For example, on June 6, 1997, dozens of teenage girls from Lacey Township High School in Aberdeen Township, New Jersey, were getting ready for the prom. Melissa Drexler was one of those girls. But unlike her peers, Drexler was also nine months pregnant, and the morning of the prom, her water broke. Determined not to miss the prom, or perhaps determined to continue keeping her pregnancy a secret from her parents, friends, and the father of the child, Drexler, despite being in labor, decided to attend the prom anyway. What happened when she arrived, however, would change the course of her life forever.

Upon arriving at the prom, the eighteen-year-old girl went immediately to the bathroom, locked herself in a stall, and gave birth, alone, in about fifteen minutes. She cut the umbilical cord on the metal trash bin inside the stall, wrapped several trash bags

around the male infant, and placed him in the trash bin of another stall. She then washed her hands and returned to the prom. When just moments later several girls alerted maintenance to a large amount of blood on the floor of the stall in which Drexler gave birth, the infant was discovered. First teachers and then paramedics attempted CPR on the infant, but he was already dead. Autopsy reports showed oxygen in his lungs and a small cut that bled on one of his feet; both facts indicate that the infant was born alive, a fact which Drexler herself finally verified after months of denying knowing whether he was born alive or dead.

In fact, it took Drexler several months to make any sort of admission, but reading from a prepared statement after deciding to plead guilty in exchange for a lesser sentence, Drexler stated the following in court:

I knew I was pregnant. I concealed the pregnancy from everyone. On the morning of the prom my water broke. While I was in the car on the way to the prom, I began to have cramps. I went to the prom, and I went into the bathroom and delivered the baby. The baby was born alive. I knowingly took the baby out of the toilet and wrapped a series of garbage bags around the baby. I then placed the baby in another garbage bag, knotted it closed and threw it in the trash can. I was aware of what I was doing at the time when I placed the baby in the bag. And I was further aware that what I did would most certainly result in the death of the baby. (“No Explanation”)

Originally charged with murder, under the terms of her plea bargain, she was charged with aggravated manslaughter and was sentenced to fifteen years in prison. Upon

sentencing, Monmouth County Superior Court Judge John Ricciardi stated, “Hopefully by this sentence, other young, single, pregnant women will look first to lawful ways of dealing with their problem and will realize that the taking of the life of a child in this manner is wrong, it is criminal and it will be punished by our society” (“Prom Mom Sorry”).

The fact that infanticide cases are horrific is difficult to dispute, and the facts of the Drexler case are indeed heart-wrenching. Additionally, the public interest in high profile infanticide cases remains insatiable,¹⁸⁸ and these types of cases thus make their way into popular culture via television newscasts and programs, via magazines and newspapers, and via the internet. Perhaps the public interest stems from mainstream society’s need to protect its children. When children, especially helpless infants, are the victims of crimes by their mother, the public takes notice because this crime is specifically so intimate and “unnatural.” Motherhood is often viewed as a natural duty, hence the phrase “a mother’s instinct.” When a woman deviates from a motivated desire to fulfill her inalienable, necessary right as a woman to not only bear a child but also love, nurture, and protect that child, that woman is perceived as irregular and/or unregulated.

These women clearly have acted outside the normative societal guidelines in place for mothers. Mothers are supposed to love and protect their children. When mothers do not fulfill this role, the scrutiny shifts to the society itself, and the question quickly becomes how are we, as a society, producing women capable of this kind of heinous act? These women quickly become symbols rather than “real” women. Their

¹⁸⁸ One need to only look toward the media sensation that a young mother from Florida named Casey Anthony has created, accused in 2008 of killing her three-year-old daughter.

identities are stripped, and in this removal, they “become” their crime, a crime which in many ways highlights not the murder itself but instead all of the “wrong” that the mother engaged in leading to the crime. For example, Melissa Drexler was known not by her name but by the title of “prom mom,” nicknamed in the same way that Chamblit and other women who committed infanticide were. The only parts of her identity that mattered were the facts that she was eighteen and still in high school, that she was unmarried and pregnant, that her body was slender enough to hide the pregnancy. When Monmouth County Superior Court Judge John Ricciardi sentenced her, he stated that he hoped that the punishment of her action would be a lesson to “young, single, pregnant women” dealing with the same “problem.” The comment highlights the parts of her identity that matter: her young age, her out-of-wedlock pregnancy/problem. Ricciardi was attempting to find a probable “cause” behind her action, linking the child’s murder to her age and social class.

The prepared statement Drexler read in court also warrants attention. Carefully crafted, it leaves no room whatsoever to implicate anyone else: “I was pregnant; I went to the prom; I delivered the baby; I was aware that what I did would most certainly result in the death of the baby.” Clearly, Drexler’s lawyers had a hand in her confession; in fact, Drexler’s voice is hard to find in that mechanical admission which was so cautiously delivered. Missing, however, the media noted, was an explanation or more importantly, an apology. Nonetheless, the media were satisfied that Drexler admitted what many had already decided was true themselves. And Judge Ricciardi, with his statements, seemed assured that her actions would ultimately prove a valuable lesson to other “young girls” in her situation.

The comparison between Drexler and Rebekah Chamblit is quite clear, and it is no coincidence that our society still treats these matters so similarly so many centuries later. But what stands out in terms of this dissertation, is the narrative that is constructed in relation to the crime. In Chamblit's case, her narrative was constructed by professional printers; Drexler's was constructed, in one sense, by her lawyers, but in another sense by the media. It is indeed the sensationalism, the rhetoric surrounding the case that is noteworthy. The use of language, and the rhetoric within the texts, tells the story. As with Chamblit, Drexler's illegitimacy is defined in several ways: her crime, her marital status, and her social class all contribute to this label.

Revisiting Pressley, obviously people do not automatically connect the label of "single mother" to any kind of criminal behavior, but people do link this label to class and to morality (marital status). Perhaps, then, it is the label and the connotations and stereotypes that accompany it that Pressley seeks to avoid with her rebuttal of the term single mother.

In Chapter One, we see Anne Hutchinson resist patriarchal subjugation; when she angers those in authority, we see them use her maternity against her, with complaints against her including the fact that she surely cannot be performing her duties as wife and mother if she also has a political presence in the community. Furthermore, they verbally attack her physicality as well, particularly her ability to produce healthy, "normal" children. It becomes clear, then, that motherhood can be a site in which women can become empowered, as it seems threatening enough to traditional Puritan culture that

women might find an opportunity for resistance somewhere there. We see this resistance from Chamblit in Chapter Two.

In Chapter Two, Rebekah Chamblit denies her maternal privilege, as she kills (or is accused of killing) her infant son when he is just minutes old. With modern-day infanticide cases like Drexler's, typically a society wants reasons because the crime is so intimate and perceived as going "against nature"; mothers who kill their children are rejecting what women should not only do but naturally want to do. But understandably, reasons are complex in these cases, as mental illness, shame, and poverty can all play a factor, among other influences. Readers will never know why Chamblit killed her child—or if she even killed him—but interestingly, reasons are not what her contemporaries cared about, which is why this chapter is about the language and rhetoric surrounding the case, not the crime itself. In fact, again we see the emphasis moving back to her sexuality, as the ministers focused on the "uncleanness" of Chamblit's sin, not the murder itself. As horrifying as infanticide may be to us, Chamblit nonetheless makes revealing rhetorical choices in her final personal statement about how she is going to present her life and her crime. Her unregulated motherhood and her attempt, however mediated, to tell her own story is the driving force behind the ministerial reaction to this case. Readers must look to the places in the narrative where it falls away from the conventional genre choices, for these gaps perhaps reveal the truest voice, the least mediated voice, from Chamblit.

In Chapter Three, Susanna Rowson and Hannah Webster Foster struggled with ways to represent women's independence in regards to their sexuality. These authors use the characters of Eliza Wharton and Charlotte Temple to defy tradition and patriarchal

authority. Each character had the advantage of advice from her parent/s, but pursues an alternate course which ends in disastrous results. But when we compare a similar situation from the same time period outside of literature, we find that the results do not have to be so disastrous, which suggests that these novels, in some ways, mimic or reinforce the controlling rhetoric of the ministers. As such, these novels demonstrate the difficulty to disengage the patriarchal control, even in attempts to manage it.

Finally, in Chapter Four, Lydia Maria Child and Nathaniel Hawthorne use the trope of motherhood to deflect traditional Puritan authority, not only in the most obvious way of their character's actual pregnancies, with Hester Prynne conceiving her child with a man who was not her husband and who was a local minister and Mary Conant conceiving her child with a Native American man, but also in terms of the way their characters care for their children, which can also work to counter the patriarchal forces as well. Mary embraces motherhood, and her character uses it as way to regain her mental stability as she begins her new life outside of the influence of her strict Puritan father. Hester, of course, mothers her daughter Pearl alone, and she raises her to be an outspoken child who has no fear. Both authors create women characters that are successful in achieving a high level of independence, though I would argue that Hawthorne's character Hester embodies this aggressive independence to the highest level, as his character overcomes immense obstacles only to garner the respect of her community who once shunned her in the end.

So now revisiting the “movie poster” for *The Scarlet Letter* seems apt. The suggestion of illegitimacy is clearly the way that the poster tries to make *The Scarlet Letter* sexy and appealing for a young audience, as a new cohort of readers approaches this classic novel. Of course, the fact that there might be some inherent danger, some kind of unregulated behavior, very well might catch the attention of this millennial generation, and really, the poster is not that inaccurate, I decided. Hester’s behavior is dangerous—not only to her and her child, but also to her community as well. Her very existence is threatening to her village. However, as Bercovitch has argued, Hester represents much more than danger, for by the end of the novel, Hester has won the respect of her society because she remained strong and steadfast despite her situation. Bercovitch, in fact, suggests that she represents conformity, with rebellion kept within very strict limits. However, she never asks for help or pity; rather, she is quite able to care of herself and her child, something that the mothers in the majority of the texts in this dissertation were unable to do. Consider Charlotte Temple and Eliza Wharton, for example. Neither character was able to take care of herself. While the novel may be sold to this new generation on the premise of danger and illegitimacy, Hawthorne has certainly worked to deconstruct these ideas by the end of the novel with his imagined colonial world, his revision of colonial New England.

The character of Hester Prynne was a particular type of woman and mother, and her actions are sometimes legitimate and sometimes illegitimate. And perhaps this is why the Prynne character is such a fitting end to a dissertation on “illegitimate” mothering. Prynne demonstrates how patriarchy both contains and does not contain, and she demonstrates that really, there is not an established set of standards that detail what or

whom a given society might deem as legitimate. Prynne, as well as each of the women or characters analyzed in this dissertation, reveals the fact that the historical moment in which the mother makes the choices has more influence upon legitimacy than anything else. Mothers make the choices that they deem necessary at the time, but the political and social climate makes the final determination on the “legitimacy” of those choices.

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