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The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic

Jan Lewis

WHEN the American colonists commenced rebellion against the British government and assumed the separate and equal station to which they believed the laws of God and nature both entitled them, they found in marriage—"that SOCIAL UNION, which the beneficent Creator instituted for the happiness of Man"—a metaphor for their ideal of social and political relationships. In the republic envisioned by American writers, citizens were to be bound together not by patriarchy's duty or liberalism's self-interest, but by affection, and it was, they believed, marriage, more than any other institution, that trained citizens in this virtue. Thus "L," writing in the *Royal American Magazine* in 1774, explained why this "social union is so essential to human happiness." The married man, he wrote, "by giving pleasure . . . receives it back again with increase. By this endearing intercourse of friendship and communication of pleasure, the tender feelings and soft passions of the soul are awakened with all the ardour of love and benevolence. . . . In this happy state, man feels a growing attachment to human nature, and love to his country."¹ Marriage was the very pattern from which the cloth of republican society was to be cut.

Revolutionary-era writers held up the loving partnership of man and wife in opposition to patriarchal dominion as the republican model for social and political relationships. The essays, stories, poems, and novels

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¹"Thoughts on Matrimony," *Royal American Magazine* (Boston), Jan. 1774, 9. Historians have explored the anti-patriarchal dimensions of the Revolution. See Jay Fliegelman, *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800* (New York, 1982); Edwin G. Burrows and Michael Wallace, "The American Revolution: The Ideology and Psychology of National Liberation," *Perspectives in American History*, VI (1972), 167-306; Winthrop D. Jordan, "Familial Politics: Thomas Paine and the Killing of the King, 1776," *Journal of American History*, LX (1973), 294-308; and Melvin Yazawa, *From Colonies to Commonwealth: Familial Ideology and the Beginnings of the American Republic* (Baltimore, 1985). Fliegelman has noted that the Revolutionary generation found in the "affectionate union" of marriage an alternative to the patriarchal model of political relationships (*Prodigals*, chap. 4).

that established this model created in republican marriage an ideal that drew upon recent social trends and infused them with political meaning; in so doing, their authors created for women an important new political role, not so much as a mother, as Linda K. Kerber has suggested,² but, rather, as a wife. As an indispensable half of the conjugal union that served as the ideal for political as well as familial relationships, the Republican Wife exemplified the strengths and weaknesses of the Revolutionary era's notion of woman's role and, indeed, of republicanism itself; neither can be understood fully except in the context of the other.

Because historians have begun to question whether American political discourse in the period 1775-1815 can be understood in terms of republicanism alone, it is important to note that the adjective "republican" will be used here much as Americans of the period used it—to signify not only classical republicanism but also that fusion of civic humanism and evangelical ardor achieved by Americans at the eve of the Revolution. The key to republicanism is virtue, the self-sacrificial and disinterested quality that was prized in both sacred and secular traditions.³ The premium that

²Linda K. Kerber coined the term "Republican Motherhood" to describe the peculiar political mission assigned to American women in the Revolutionary era. In an influential article and book she used the term to characterize the indirect political role that women were to play by "raising sons and disciplining husbands to be virtuous citizens of the republic" ("The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment—An American Perspective," *American Quarterly*, XXVIII [1976], 187-205, quotation on p. 203, and *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* [Chapel Hill, N.C., 1980]). Although Kerber focused upon the domestic rather than the maternal character of woman's political participation, her term has taken on a life of its own and is often assumed to say more about motherhood than Kerber herself ever claimed. (See, for example, Mary Beth Norton, "The Evolution of White Women's Experience in Early America," *American Historical Review*, LXXXIX [1984], 616-619; Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France, and the United States, 1780-1860* [New York, 1984], chap. 2, and *passim*; and Mary P. Ryan, *Womanhood in America: From Colonial Times to the Present*, 3d ed. [New York, 1983], 101-104.) Indeed, as Ruth H. Bloch first suggested, comparatively little attention was paid in the period 1785-1815 to the republican dimensions of motherhood, in relation to woman's other roles ("American Feminine Ideals in Transition: The Rise of the Moral Mother, 1785-1815," *Feminist Studies*, IV [1978], 125-126, n. 67). More recently Kerber has argued that "republican motherhood was a conceptualization which grafted the language of liberal individualism onto the inherited discourse of civic humanism," which could not, in and of itself, "effectively describe an active role for women in the republic" ("The Republican Ideology of the Revolutionary Generation," *Am. Qtrly.*, XXXVII [1985], 486, 484). The argument here is that American republicanism offered women a role as wives. It was left to liberalism, as Kerber suggests, to extol the political dimensions of motherhood.

³See especially Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1969); his analysis of the meaning of republicanism informs this essay. For a discussion of the meaning of virtue to contemporary Americans see Ruth H. Bloch, "The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, XIII (forthcom-

republican thought placed upon disinterestedness has obscured the revolutionary nature of its views about women. To be sure, republican theorists were unwilling to think of women, or any other group, as having different and perhaps antagonistic interests;⁴ hence, they did not address women as a separate group. Republicanism assumed, however, that America's dawning glory would cast its beneficent rays upon the whole of society, a new and different society in which women would be required to play a new and unprecedented role.

If we would understand the role designed for women in the early national era, we must look to that body of Anglo-American literature that addressed political issues indirectly and found a wide and appreciative audience among the rapidly expanding reading public. Jay Fliegelman has shown that when we read those popular literary, pedagogical, and didactic works for their political meaning, we gain a new perspective on both the development of political thought in the eighteenth century and the intimate connections between family and polity in eighteenth-century thought. Much of the commentary about woman's nature and her proper role can be found in novels and in the fiction and essays of the growing number of popular magazines.⁵

ing). A useful review of the literature of republicanism is provided by Robert E. Shalhope, "Republicanism and Early American Historiography," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d Ser., XXXIX (1982), 334-356. Although republicanism can be described as a wholly secular ideology, and the exact contributions of religious thought and feeling to it are certainly debated, its religious dimension must be recognized; as a popular ideology—that is, as one that was expressed in fiction and magazines by writers who reflected more than they shaped its key beliefs—republicanism was an amalgam of secular and sacred elements. Perhaps its ability to tap so many in-some-ways-contradictory roots explains republicanism's broad and enduring appeal.

⁴ See Wood, *Creation*, esp. 53-65, for the republican hostility to "interest." For the history of women in the era of the Revolution see Gerda Lerner, "The Lady and the Mill Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson," in *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* (New York, 1979), 15-30; Joan Hoff Wilson, "The Illusion of Change: Women and the American Revolution," in Alfred F. Young, ed., *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism* (DeKalb, Ill., 1976), 383-445; Mary Beth Norton, *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women* (New York, 1980); and Kerber, *Women of the Republic*. For a review of this literature see Norton, "Women's Experience," *AHR*, LXXXIX (1984), 593-619.

⁵ Fliegelman, *Prodigals*. For the growth of literacy see Kenneth A. Lockridge, *Literacy in Colonial New England: An Enquiry into the Social Context of Literacy in the Early Modern West* (New York, 1974). For the tastes of the American reading public see David Lundberg and Henry F. May, "The Enlightened Reader in America," *Am. Qtly.*, XXVII (1976), 262-293; Garry Wills, *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence* (Garden City, N.Y., 1978), esp. pt. 4; and Herbert Ross Brown, *The Sentimental Novel in America, 1789-1860* (Durham, N.C., 1940), esp. chap. 1. The relevance of literature to an understanding of women's history has been explored by Mary Sumner Benson, *Women in Eigh-*

Americans drew no clear distinctions between that which was "fiction" and that which was not, between works addressed to men and works addressed to women, or even between British literature and original American creations; nor should we. Moreover, what concerns us here is the meaning that American men and women might derive from popular literature. The moral message in what might seem a diverse body of works was remarkably consistent. Magazine editors, for example, aimed both to instruct and to entertain, devoting their periodicals to "knowledge and entertainment," "entertaining knowledge and instructions," and "amusement and instruction." They and their readers could find knowledge entertaining and a properly written piece of fiction instructive.⁶ Indeed, fiction served to illustrate the workings of character. In the moral world of the eighteenth century, character was all, and the study of character was an important aspect of moral philosophy, itself a branch of post-Newtonian natural science.⁷ Here art and science might fuse.

Similarly, although some periodicals seem to have been addressed primarily to men and others to women, most welcomed both sexes as readers and authors and printed articles that presumably were of interest to both sexes.⁸ In fact, no magazines intended exclusively for women were published in America until early in the nineteenth century.⁹ The themes of courtship, marriage, and seduction figured to a greater or lesser extent in a wide range of early national publications, not only the *Boston Women's Magazine* but also, for example, Paine's *Pennsylvania Magazine* and Webster's *American Magazine*. The topic of marriage was not reserved to women or their magazines, for it was an issue of public, indeed political, import.

Finally, we must note that much of what was read in America had been written in Britain. Popular British novels were brought out in American editions, and American editors, unable to fill their periodicals with original works, borrowed freely from each other and from their British counterparts.¹⁰ Yet what matters is not only the origin and intent of such works

teenth-Century America (Port Washington, N.Y., 1966 [orig. publ. New York, 1935]), and Janet Wilson James, *Changing Ideas about Women in the United States, 1776-1825* (New York, 1981).

⁶ *General Magazine and Impartial Review of Knowledge and Entertainment* (Baltimore), 1798; *Ladies Magazine, and Repository of Entertaining Knowledge* (Philadelphia), 1792; and *New York Weekly Museum, or Polite Repository of Amusement and Instruction*, 1814.

⁷ See Gordon S. Wood, "Conspiracy and the Paranoid Style: Causality and Deceit in the Eighteenth Century," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXXIX (1982), 414, and *passim*.

⁸ See, for example, *American Magazine* (New York), Dec. 1787, 3, welcoming "fair readers" as both subscribers and correspondents.

⁹ Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1741-1850* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), 139.

¹⁰ For the popularity of British works in America see Fliegelman, *Prodigals*, chap.

but also the lessons Americans might have derived from them. Bernard Bailyn has shown the special meaning British political writings may have had for Americans immersed in an imperial crisis.¹¹ So also with the popular literature of marriage.

Indeed, a British work might be edited for the American audience in ways that would make it more applicable to the American situation. In *Clarissa*, the novel of the patriarchal family par excellence, the heroine is, as Fliegelman has put it, "purely a victim caught between two tyrannies," that of the father and that of the seducer. Although Richardson held the disobedient daughter partly responsible for her sad fate, eighteenth-century American editions of the book removed that assessment of the heroine from both the subtitle and the introduction, making *Clarissa* instead the innocent victim of male arrogance, imperiousness, and design. Yet *Clarissa* was more than a seduction story; it was a political parable with particular lessons for Americans, as a fearful John Adams recognized when he observed that "Democracy is Lovelace and the people are *Clarissa*."¹²

Americans who aimed for the separate station of a viable republic would have to learn better than *Clarissa* how to resist the tyrannies and seductions that republican theorists were certain they faced. Because eighteenth-century thought placed the family and the state on one continuum, that of "society," and did not yet—as the nineteenth century would—erect a barrier between the private sphere of the family and the public one of the world, it could dramatize issues of authority in terms of relationships between members of a family.¹³ Accordingly, the young woman's quest for a suitable husband and her attempt to navigate between the eighteenth-century's Scylla of overweening power and its Charybdis of seductive liberty was the nation's plot as well.

Americans, successfully completing a revolution against one sort of tyranny, were bound to conclude that their young men and women also could achieve independence. The anti-patriarchalism of Revolutionary ideology dictated that tyranny presented the most immediate and obvious threat to American happiness, and patriarchal domination the chief obstacle to happy and virtuous marriage. According to the republican view, patriarchs such as "The Inexorable Father" who was "unfeeling as adamant, hard of heart as the nether mill stone," threatened always to block the happiness of their children; in this case, the father refused to let

2. For the reprinting of British articles in American magazines see Mott, *History*, 14-15.

¹¹ In particular, Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass., 1967), and *The Origins of American Politics* (New York, 1967).

¹² Fliegelman, *Prodigals*, 83-88; the quotation is from p. 87 and refers to abridgments only; Adams is quoted on p. 237.

¹³ See n. 1, above, and Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (New York, 1977).

his daughter marry a promising young physician who was too honest to enrich himself by overcharging his patients.¹⁴

So resonant was this anti-patriarchal theme that well after the Revolution American magazines published articles excoriating "parents . . . who are daily offering up the honour and happiness of their children at the shrine of interest and ambition,"¹⁵ much as the British government had sacrificed its American colonies. Instead, "marriages should be contracted from motives of affection, rather than of interest." Fortunately, such unions were possible in "happy America," where partible inheritance—"provided our conduct does not render us unworthy"—formed "the basis of equality and the incitement to industry and caution." If America's sons and daughters were educated to "virtue and good morality," they would choose to marry for love rather than interest.¹⁶ Being capable of exercising sound judgment, children were not obligated to obey the injunctions of narrow-minded or rapacious parents.

The rhetoric of marriage bears the same relationship to the prevailing customs as does republican ideology to the events it sought to shape and define: in each case, the terms of analysis explained long-range trends by turning them into dramas enacted by villains and heroes—or, more commonly, heroines. Historians of the family have shown that parental control of marriage declined over the course of the eighteenth century, while children's autonomy increased.¹⁷ That trend had its roots in the

¹⁴ *Massachusetts Magazine* (Boston), Oct. 1791, 619-620. See similarly "The Unfeeling Father," *ibid.*, May 1792, 286, and "The Precipitate Lover," *Gentleman and Lady's Town and Country Magazine* (Boston), Oct. 1794, 227-232.

¹⁵ "Essay on Parental Care and Filial Duty," *New York Magazine*, Jan. 1794, 49. This article may well have originated in Britain, for it speaks of "rich and noble parents." See also "On the Treatment of the Fair Sex," *Lady's Magazine and Musical Repository* (New York), Apr. 1801, 214: "It has been remarked, that the public affairs of most nations have been conducted with more or less elegance, dexterity, and success, as they respectively restrain or give freedom to their women." Such articles had as their object proving (or bringing about) American superiority, of which the status of women was deemed a fit measure. See also Wood, *Creation*, 46-48, 97-107.

¹⁶ "Improvements Suggested in Female Education," *N.Y. Mag.*, N.S., Aug. 1797, 407; "Lindor to Caroline," *Mass. Mag.*, May 1792, 312, 313. See also "On Marriage," *Gent. and Lady's Mag.*, Mar. 1789, 85-86; "On Parental Authority," *Ladies Mag.* (Philadelphia), Oct. 1792, 239; and "The Censor," *Christian's, Scholar's, and Farmer's Magazine* (Elizabethtown, N.J.), Apr.-May 1790, 49.

¹⁷ See Daniel Scott Smith, "Parental Power and Marriage Patterns: An Analysis of Historical Trends in Hingham, Massachusetts," *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, XXXV (1973), 419-428; Robert A. Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York, 1976), 98-102; Daniel Blake Smith, *Inside the Great House: Planter Family Life in Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake Society* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1980), chap. 4; and Jan Lewis, *The Pursuit of Happiness: Family and Values in Jefferson's Virginia* (New York, 1983), 187-203. See also Randolph Trumbach, *The Rise of the Egalitarian Family: Aristocratic Kinship and Domestic Relations in Eighteenth-*

Reformation; Protestantism, with its insistence that “mutual comfort” was one of marriage’s primary purposes, had licensed the consensual, affectionate union.¹⁸ Although American Puritan ministers still retained for parents, by virtue of their supposedly superior wisdom, a key role in selecting their children’s mates, they nonetheless recognized that “marriage is one of the weightiest actions of a person’s life, and as the Yoke fellow is suitable or unsuitable, so that condition is like to be very comfortable or uncomfortable.” Nor did wealth establish a potential spouse’s suitability. As Cotton Mather rhymed it, “The Wretch that is alone to *Mammon* Wed, / May chance to find a *Satan* in the Bed.”¹⁹ Interest alone, whether personal or dynastic, had never been an acceptable basis for marriage in the colonies; what changed were, on the one hand, determinations of who was best qualified, the parents or the children, to recognize merit in a potential spouse and, on the other, perceptions of how likely the affections of marriage were, in and of themselves, to assure lasting happiness. During the eighteenth century, parents grew less willing or able to exert the full range of pressures at their command to shape their children’s destinies; the balance tipped in favor of the younger generation’s discretion.

Thus rhetoric that implicitly likened late eighteenth-century parents to designing court ministers, bent upon subjecting their dependents, grossly exaggerated the control that parents retained over their children’s marriages and, in fact, overstated the power parents had held a century earlier. Nonetheless, the rhetoric of marriage, much like that of politics, served both to expose underlying fears and to legitimate and encourage patterns that had already come to prevail.

Republican theorists endeavored to show how, in a post-patriarchal world, citizens could govern themselves, how they could form a society bound by love rather than fear. Because they deemed marriage the school of affection, authors who wrote about the institution were addressing one of their age’s most pressing questions: how to make citizens fit for a republic. For example, if the choice of a mate were, or should be, the individual’s, he or she must know how to select wisely. And if the parents no longer did, or should, have control, substitute parents could still give

Century England (New York, 1978), chap. 2, and Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500-1800* (New York, 1977), chaps. 7, 8.

¹⁸ See Stone, *Family*, 135-142; Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, Mass., 1983), chap. 1; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York, 1982), chap. 6; John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York, 1970), 82-99, 150-170; and Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (New York, 1966 [orig. publ. Boston, 1944]), chap. 2. See also Jean-Louis Flandrin, *Families in Former Times: Kinship, Household and Sexuality*, trans. Richard Southern (Cambridge, 1979), 145-173.

¹⁹ Benjamin Wadsworth, *The Well-Ordered Family* (Boston, 1712), 42; Cotton Mather, *Eureka; or A Vertuous Woman Found . . .* (Boston, 1703), 3.

advice, which they did at great length in numerous tracts and essays. Parents did not abdicate; rather, they refashioned themselves into friendly paternalists who exerted influence in their families by more subtle, psychological means and in the wider world by words of friendly counsel.²⁰ Thus the author of "A Father's Advice to his Daughters" recommended that his own daughters and those of other men "place confidence in those who have shown affection for you in your early days, when you were incapable of making them any return."²¹ Yet even those dethroned patriarchs who posed as kind advisors believed they best served young men and women by enabling them to choose wisely their own partners.

What sort of man made the ideal husband? He was republican virtue incarnate, moderation personified. He was "devout without superstition, and pious without melancholy, . . . careful without avarice, [manifesting] a kind of unconcernedness without negligence." He should be well educated but not "a pedant." A woman should look for "virtuous conduct, good temper, discretion, regularity and industry," and a "mild and even" disposition.²² Unlike her European sisters, who supposedly married to raise their status, the American maid aimed at—and hoped to maintain—a happy medium, a domestic version of that steadily improving yet never-changing society that Gordon S. Wood has identified as the ideal society of republican dreams. Thus the happily married woman would find that her husband "would always be the same, and always pleasing."²³

The good husband was like the good citizen; he wed "not by interest but by choice," and "he treats his wife with delicacy as a woman, with tenderness as a friend." He "ever studied the happiness of the woman he loved more than his own."²⁴ In fact, the ideal husband resembled more than a little the popular portrait of the Revolutionary War officer, which is precisely the occupation Royall Tyler chose for the hero of his play *The Contrast*. To ensure that the officer/suitor's character could not be mistaken, Tyler dubbed him "Colonel Manly" and gave him such quintes-

²⁰ See Lewis, *Pursuit of Happiness*, 175-187; Jane Turner Censer, *North Carolina Planters and Their Children, 1800-1860* (Baton Rouge, La., 1984), esp. 60-64, 68-70; and Fliegelman, *Prodigals*, 259-266.

²¹ *Christian's Mag.*, Feb.-Mar. 1790, 697. This article is an extract from *A Father's Legacy to His Daughters* by Dr. John Gregory of Edinburgh. Originally appearing in England in 1774, it proved one of the most popular books published in this era in America, where it went through at least 15 editions and sold more than 20,000 copies. See Benson, *Women in Eighteenth-Century America*, 59-60, and Fliegelman, *Prodigals*, 39.

²² "The Maid's Husband," *Baltimore Weekly Magazine*, May 20, 1801, 297; "On the Choice of a Husband," *Columbian Magazine or Monthly Miscellany* (Philadelphia), Feb. 1788, 67; "On the Choice of a Wife," *Gent. and Lady's Mag.*, Apr. 1789, 147; "Choice of a Husband," *Columbian Mag.*, Feb. 1788, 65.

²³ "Maid's Husband," *Baltimore Wkly. Mag.*, May 20, 1801, 297. Wood, *Creation*, 70-75.

²⁴ "Character of a Good Husband," *Mass. Mag.*, Mar. 1789, 177; "The Suspicious Lover," *ibid.*, Sept. 9, 1796, 495.

entially republican opinions as that ancient Greece declined because “the common good was lost in the pursuit of private interest” and that “the man who can plant thorns in the bosom of an unsuspecting girl is more detestable than a common robber, in the same proportion as private violence is more despicable than open force, and money of less value than happiness.”²⁵ The qualities that made a man honorable in public life, then, distinguished him as a potential husband as well.

Men, likewise, were supposed to select republicans as their life partners. As the author of “On the Choice of a Wife” put it, “virtue, wisdom, presence of mind, patience, vigour, capacity, and application, are not *sexual* qualities; they belong to all who have duties to perform and evils to endure.” Echoing standard Protestant assumptions, Americans and the British writers they chose to republish argued that the most important considerations in the selection of a wife were her “qualifications as a *companion* and a *helper*.”²⁶ The choice was difficult, for women were not equally qualified. Suitors should be wary of frivolity and mere physical beauty or what the author of “The Intrinsic Merits of Women” called “the fashionable follies of the age.” It was not that all women were suspect but that only certain types—great beauties, heiresses, and coquettes—were likely to be dangerous. Thus “the husbands of beauties are the most miserable of husbands. . . . Vexed by the vanity, exhausted by the extravagance, tortured by the inconstancy . . . life, instead of a blessing, becomes to them a purgatory.” The republican gloss is equally evident in the simple reminder that “riches . . . will never alone afford happiness to their possessors.”²⁷

Men and women both were thus advised to seek for their mates what we can recognize as embodiments of republican ideology. They were warned at even greater length to avoid certain notorious types, those associated with the despicable aspects of European court life: flatterers, deceivers, flirts, fops, coxcombs, coquettes, and all persons lacking in honor and virtue. Indeed, writers devoted so much effort to delineating the characteristics of the coxcomb and coquette that one cannot help suspecting that the type, rather than presenting a bona fide threat to naive American beaux and belles, served as a distillation, much like the tyrannical ruler or the designing minister, of what the age most feared. Flirts and fops, coxcombs and coquettes romp through the pages of republican literature with abandon. Their names are code words that signify luxury, vice, and deceit; their presence in a story points almost without exception to an

²⁵ Royall Tyler, *The Contrast: A Comedy in Five Acts* (Boston, 1920 [orig. publ. Philadelphia, 1790]), 80, 82.

²⁶ *Boston Weekly Magazine*, Dec. 29, 1804, 37; printed also in *Lady's Mag.* (New York), Mar. 1802, 168, 165. The articles are selections from *Letters from a Father to His Son* (1794) by John Aiken, an English physician, quoted in James, *Changing Ideas*, 143-144.

²⁷ *Christian's Mag.*, Dec. 1789-Jan. 1790, 628, 627. “Thoughts on the Choice of a Wife,” *Columbian Mag.*, Mar. 1792, 176. See also “On the Choice of a Wife,” *Christian's Mag.*, Aug.-Sept. 1790, 351-353.

unhappy ending. They promise ruin not only for themselves and their victims but also for the infant nation, for they practice habits that were commonly believed to spell the death of republics. So reasoned the author of "The Philosophy of Coquetry": "so long as the sensualities and pride of one sex shall delight in luxurious habits and ostentatious living; so long as the vanities of the other shall be gratified by splendid personal decorations, costly refinements, and glittering equipages—or, more philosophically speaking, so long as we shall be enslaved in a refined state of society, by numerous and factitious wants, we shall look in vain for disinterested alliances, and an union of the sexes resulting from mental attachment."²⁸

Reform began with the individual; a republican society required virtuous men and women. That belief permeates the purportedly "True Story" of "Eugenia—or the Coquette." The girl of the title had parents who were "dissipated and luxurious. . . . [T]hey looked forward to immense wealth. . . . Pride, pomp, and luxury dazzled their eyes." Indeed, "without a particle of principle, [Eugenia's] father countenanced depredation, at a time when the hirelings of tyranny were not sparing in the arts of devastation." In this republican vision a nation could be no better than the individuals who constitute it. In this story a sad fate for the nation is averted when Eugenia, who has inherited her parents' vices, jilts the decent young man who had courted her, freeing him to marry "a woman, who boasts only those real charms. . . . which constitute the perfect wife. . . . [A]s she never experienced the deceit of a fop, so he congratulates himself that he has escaped from the smiles of a coquette." Significantly, Eugenia herself is almost incidental to the story. It is her parents, stand-ins for a corrupt British government, and their ability to thwart a truly affectionate union that are most feared. In such a view, to fall for a coquette is to surrender republican virtue, and to flirt is to commit an act of treason.²⁹

When courtship and marriage are infused with political meaning, women inevitably and inescapably become political beings. Make no mistake: these first formulations of a feminine political role were not fundamentally feminist. They were not devised by women in particular, nor was their aim primarily to enhance the position of women. The dynamic, rather, was republican and anti-patriarchal: it juxtaposed the virtuous, independent child and the oppressive, corrupting parent, and it found in the union of two virtuous individuals the true end of society and the fit paradigm for political life. Such a conceptualization of the relationship between family and polity represents more a subtle shift than a clean break from earlier models. When Puritans designated the family "a little

²⁸ N.Y. Mag., N.S., Nov. 1796, 583. The classic example, of course, is Hannah Foster's *The Coquette; or, The History of Eliza Wharton* . . . (Boston, 1797).

²⁹ *Columbian Mag.*, Nov. 1792, 334-335. See also "The Flirt. A Moral Tale," *ibid.*, June 1791, 389-391; "A Vindication of the Fair Sex, Against the Charge of Preferring Coxcombs to Men of Worth and Genius," *ibid.*, July 1792, 28-30; and "The Ladies New Catechism," *Baltimore Wkly. Mag.*, May 20, 1801, 303.

commonwealth," they meant it to be "a schoole wherein the first principles and grounds of government and subjection are learned: whereby men are fitted to greater matters in Church or commonwealth."³⁰ In such a family the relationship between parent and child was most important.

When anti-patriarchalists in the eighteenth century substituted marriage for parenthood as the fundamental familial relationship, they did not, however, question the assumption that the family was but the society in miniature. Society still appeared as the family writ large, with the same sorts of relationships deemed appropriate for both the as-yet-undifferentiated spheres of home and world. Yet in shifting interest from the parent-child nexus to the husband-wife bond, eighteenth-century authors necessarily raised women to a new moral and political stature. When the key relationship in a society is that between father and son or ruler and subject, women may conveniently be ignored; when the most important relationship is between conjugal equals, and when the family is still seen as the correlative of the larger society, then women can no longer be overlooked. If the affectionate union between a man and his wife, freely entered into, without tyrannical interference, is the model for all the relationships in the society and the polity, then the wife, as an indispensable half of the marital union, is a political creature.

To the extent that the success of the republican endeavor rested upon the character of citizens, republicanism demanded virtue of women, not because it numbered them as citizens but because it recognized how intimately women, in consensual unions, were connected to men. A virtuous man required a virtuous mate. Moreover, republicanism called upon every means at its disposal to assure male virtue. That obsession with virtue, deriving its force from the fusion of Protestant and republican notions of character, persisted long after the Revolution had been won and the Constitution ratified. Well into the nineteenth century, Americans linked the fate of their nation to the virtues of its people.³¹ Even if, as several historians have suggested, certain thinkers, before the end of the eighteenth century, had embraced liberalism and its premise of the self-interested individual,³² popular writers and, presumably, their audience had not. One writer put it emphatically: "Private vices are *not* public

³⁰ William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London, 1622), quoted in Demos, *Little Commonwealth*, xix.

³¹ See Perry Miller, "From the Covenant to the Revival," in James Ward Smith and A. Leland Jamison, eds., *The Shaping of American Religion* (Princeton, N.J., 1961), 322-368. For the legacy of republicanism see Drew R. McCoy, *The Elusive Republic: Political Economy in Jeffersonian America* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1980).

³² See, for example, Joyce Appleby, "Commercial Farming and the 'Agrarian Myth' in the Early Republic," *JAH*, LXVIII (1982), 833-849, and "What Is Still American in the Political Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson?" *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXXIX (1982), 287-309; John Patrick Diggins, *The Lost Soul of American Politics: Virtue, Self-Interest, and the Foundations of Liberalism* (New York, 1984); and Isaac Kramnick, "Republican Revisionism Revisited," *AHR*, LXXXVII (1982), 629-664.

benefits." That rejection of Bernard Mandeville infused much of the early national literature, and that conceptualization of society—which continued to see the family as the microcosm of the wider world and to insist that "public good must grow out of private virtue"³³—held out a significant role for women.

"A woman of virtue and prudence is a public good—a public benefactor." She has the power to make "public decency . . . a fashion—and public virtue the only example." And how is woman to accomplish that great end? By her influence over the manners of men. Indeed, "nothing short of a general reformation of manners would take place, were the ladies to use their power in discouraging our licentious manners." Such a role might seem trivial did Americans not consider "the general reformation of manners" one of the young nation's most important goals, and did they not think women fully capable of contributing to it. Women might begin by reforming themselves, for "there is not a more certain test of national depravity, than that which presents itself in the degeneracy of female manners."³⁴

Male manners, however, were of more concern, and in changing them women were to play their most important role. So argued men, such as the essayist who held that women who were the beneficiaries of a "virtuous and refined education" might contribute "no less to public good than to private happiness. A gentleman, who at present must degrade himself into a fop or a coxcomb in order to please the ladies, would soon find that their favor could not be gained but by exerting every manly talent in public and private life." That same view could be expressed by a woman—for example, Miss C. Hutchings, who assured her fellow boarding-school graduates of the influence of "female manners on society in general": "were all women rational, unaffected and virtuous, coxcombs, flatterers and libertines would no longer exist." Such arguments rested on several important new assumptions. First, although the concern with "manners" betokened an upper-class emphasis upon gentility, the insistence that women are—or can be—a moral force transforms manners into mores, into the moral foundation of the society. Thus "it is . . . to the virtues of the fair . . . that society must be indebted for its moral, as well as its natural preservation."³⁵ Second, women play their moral role not by denying

³³ *Gent. and Lady's Mag.*, July 1789, 311; "Review of the Boarding School," *Columbian Phenix and Boston Review*, May 1800, 278. See also "The Reflector No. V," *Ladies' Monitor* (New York), Dec. 5, 1801, 124-125.

³⁴ "Scheme for Increasing the Power of the Fair Sex," *Ladies Mag.* (Philadelphia), June 1792, 22, 24, reprinted in *Baltimore Wkly. Mag.*, Apr. 1, 1801, 241; "The Reflector No. IX," *Ladies' Monitor*, Jan 2, 1802, 156.

³⁵ "The Influence of the Female Sex on the Enjoyments of Social Life," *Christian's Mag.*, Oct.-Nov. 1789, 497, reprinted in *Columbian Mag.*, Mar. 1790, 153-154; "Influence of the Female Character on Society in General," *Boston Wkly. Mag.*, Oct. 30, 1802, 3; "Reflector No. IX," *Ladies' Monitor*, Jan. 2, 1802, 156.

their sexuality, by becoming "passionless,"³⁶ but by using it to tempt men to be good.

This conceptualization of female influence seems to have intrigued men and women in the decades just after the Revolution. Magazines printed and reprinted numbers of articles with similar titles and sentiments: "Female Influence," "Scheme for Increasing the Power of the Fair Sex," "The Influence of the Female Sex on the Enjoyments of Social Life," "The Power of Beauty, and the Influence the Fair Sex might have in Reforming the Manners of the World."³⁷ These, with a host of similar articles, argued that the potential for beneficial female influence was almost unlimited.

The height of a woman's influence was reached during the period of "love and courtship," which, "it is universally allowed, invest a lady with more authority than in any other situation that falls to the lot of human beings." A young man who addressed his classmates at Columbia College's commencement elaborated: "She can mold the taste, the manners, and the conduct of her admirers, according to her pleasure." Moreover, "she can, even to a great degree, change their tempers and dispositions, and superinduce habits entirely new." Thus it was not in childhood that a man was most malleable; rather, it was when, grown to maturity, he sought the favors of a young lady that he was most susceptible to influence. "By the judicious management of this noble passion [love], a passion with which the truly accomplished of the fair sex never fail of inspiring men, what almost miraculous reformatations may be brought about?"³⁸

Once she had seduced him into virtue, the married woman's task was to preserve her husband in the exalted state to which her influence had raised him. "It rests with her, not only to confirm those virtuous habits which he has already acquired, but also to excite his perseverance in the paths of rectitude."³⁹ The boldness of this formulation is stunning. What earlier

³⁶ On the changing conceptualization of woman's nature see Ruth H. Bloch, "Untangling the Roots of Modern Sex Roles: A Survey of Four Centuries of Change," *Signs*, IV (1978), 237-252, and "Feminine Ideals," *Feminist Studies*, IV (1978), 101-126; Catherine M. Scholten, *Childbearing in American Society, 1650-1850* (New York, 1985); and Nancy F. Cott, "Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850," *Signs*, IV (1978), 219-236.

³⁷ "An Oration delivered at the Annual Commencement of Columbia College," *N.Y. Mag.*, May 1795, 297-305; *Ladies Mag.* (Philadelphia), June 1792, 22-24, and *Baltimore Wkly. Mag.*, Apr. 1, 1801, 241; *Christian's Mag.*, Oct.-Nov. 1789, 496-497; *Columbian Mag.*, Mar. 1790, 153-154; *Boston Wkly. Mag.*, Mar. 3, 1804, 73-74.

³⁸ "Female Influence," *N.Y. Mag.*, May 1795, 299, 300. See similarly Benjamin Rush, "Thoughts upon Female Education, Accommodated to the Present State of Society, Manners, and Government in the United States of America," in Frederick Rudolph, ed., *Essays on Education in the Early Republic* (Cambridge, Mass., 1965), 25-40. See also Rush's "A Plan for the Establishment of Public Schools and the Diffusion of Knowledge in Pennsylvania," *ibid.*, 21-22.

³⁹ "Female Influence," *N.Y. Mag.*, May 1795, 300.

Americans perceived as Eve's most dangerous characteristic, her seductiveness, is here transformed into her capacity for virtue. Woman was to lead man into rectitude, to lure him to the exercise of manly virtue. What miraculous reformations became possible when the attraction between the sexes, which for millennia had been considered the cause of the fall of mankind, could be transformed into the bedrock of the nation! Women indeed had great power—nothing less than the ability, as one magazine implored, “to make our young men, not in empty words, but in deed and in truth, republicans.”⁴⁰

That was why so much importance was attached to the education of women. Passion could and must be tempered by reason. If Eve's daughters could deserve, as one young woman put it, to be “extolled for the beauties of their minds instead of their persons . . . , then would mankind enjoy that happiness which was first intended for the happy pair in Paradise.” Were women properly educated, “then will the halcyon days dawn, and human nature appear in its highest beauty and perfection.” Few topics excited more interest in the early national period than education, for it seemed to hold the key to making “our women virtuous and respectable; our men brave, honest, and honorable—and the *American People* in general *an EXAMPLE of HONOUR and VIRTUE* to the rest of the world.”⁴¹ Writers were not always clear or certain about whether the American people were naturally virtuous or whether, instead, they merely had unusual potential to be so; hence the extremes of millennial hope and overwhelming fear, as men and women envisioned both the prospect of paradise on earth and the potential for disastrous failure.⁴²

Unless we recognize how grandiose American expectations could be and how terrifying was the possibility that they might not be realized, we cannot fully appreciate how central female education was to the republican agenda. While it is true that some reformers advocated educating women so that they, in turn, could teach their children,⁴³ the more important

⁴⁰ “Female Economy,” *Ladies' Literary Cabinet* (New York), July 8, 1820, 67. See also “Woman,” *N.Y. Wkly. Museum*, Aug. 27, 1814, 132.

⁴¹ “Clio,” “On Female Education,” *N.Y. Mag.*, Sept. 1794, 570; “The Gossip No. XXVII,” *Boston Wkly. Mag.*, May 28, 1803, 125. See also “On Female Education,” *Royal Am. Mag.*, Jan. 1774, 10, and *Ladies' Lit. Cab.*, Aug. 12, 1820, 112. For the importance that republicans attached to education see Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876* (New York, 1980), 103-148. See also the essays in Rudolph, ed., *Essays on Education*.

⁴² Wood, *Creation*, chap. 3; Miller, “Covenant to Revival,” in Smith and Jamison, eds., *Shaping of American Religion*, 322-368; Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1979). See also “Education,” *Am. Mag.*, Dec. 1787, 22-26.

⁴³ For example, “Review of the Cultivation of Female Intellect in the United States,” *Virginia Evangelical and Literary Magazine* (Richmond), May 1827, 244, June 1827, 292, as well as the works cited in n. 39, above. See also Kerber, “Daughters of Columbia: Educating Women for the Republic, 1787-1805,” in Stanley Elkins and Eric McKittrick, eds., *The Hofstadter Aegis: A Memorial* (New York, 1974), 36-59.

consideration, always, was to make women into fit companions for republican men and, especially, reliable guarantors of masculine virtue. Hence, as one man put it, "would the females keep in view the influence they possess over our education, they would not fail to perceive an attention to their own as nearly connected with the welfare of mankind. . . . Do they admire and respect the man of sense, and treat with contempt the coxcomb and the fop, [a young man] will, to recommend himself to their esteem, form himself to usefulness and virtue."⁴⁴ No one argued that women were naturally more virtuous or pure than men; rather, they had the capacity to overcome weakness and become good.

Nor, certainly, were all women natural republicans; the books and magazines of the age are populated with as many coquettes and flirts as coxcombs and fops. Human nature was malleable, and if it could be bent toward the good, to make a republican, it might also be warped toward evil,⁴⁵ creating a coxcomb or coquette. Obviously, those who believed in the malleability of character rejected Calvinistic assumptions about innate depravity, and nowhere is their departure from the older orthodoxy more clear than in their expectations of feminine virtue. Thus one essayist advised women of the enormous power they had at their disposal: "as Milton says, *The world lies all before them*, and it is theirs to mould into what shape they please."⁴⁶

That paraphrase and application of the penultimate lines of *Paradise Lost* are a good deal more sanguine than the original. So optimistic a reading of Milton, with its suggestion that the world was Eve's to make, even into a new paradise, drew upon millennial hopes that had become an integral part of American culture.⁴⁷ To be sure, such expectations did not always express a literal belief in the imminence of Christ's thousand-year reign, and they were often dampened by a lurking fear that they might not be realized. Still, the Revolution unloosed a flood of optimism—so much, in fact, that some Americans could begin to think of themselves as "new" men, veritable American Adams, given the opportunity to make the world and themselves anew. As Paine put it, America "has it in her choice to do, and to live as she pleases. The world is in her hands." This persistent strain in American thought is well known to students of American culture.⁴⁸ Yet there could be no Adam without an Eve; in the garden, as described in Genesis and by Milton, Adam had a companion who sinned first. Without Eve, Adam presumably would have remained in Paradise; that reminder of

⁴⁴ "On Love," *General Mag. and Review*, June 1798, 22.

⁴⁵ Fliegelman, *Prodigals*, 15.

⁴⁶ "The Power of Beauty, and the Influence the Fair Sex might have in Reforming the Manners of the World," *Boston Wkly. Mag.*, Mar. 3, 1804, 74.

⁴⁷ See Ruth H. Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800* (New York, 1985).

⁴⁸ "The Crisis, No. 15," in Howard Fast, ed., *The Selected Work of Tom Paine and Citizen Tom Paine* (New York, 1946), 84. See, in particular, R.W.B. Lewis, *The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago, 1955), and D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature* (New York, 1923).

woman's unhappy role in effecting human destiny had never been far from the minds of Puritan ministers such as Cotton Mather.⁴⁹ To the extent that the Fall was the most compelling of all biblical episodes for Puritans, woman played a central, and unenviable, role in the central drama of mankind. Milton's version of the Fall achieved wide popularity in America at the end of the eighteenth century, and not just among the heirs of the Puritans;⁵⁰ his Eve, although more sympathetic than the stock Puritan version, still bore primary responsibility for the great calamity.

Thus, to move to a more helpful view of human potential, it was necessary first to come to terms with the Fall. Several avenues were available. One was to shift the focus of religion from Fall to Redemption; that path was taken, particularly in the nineteenth century, as American Protestantism became more Christocentric.⁵¹ Another option was for Adam, in effect, to go his own way, without Eve, remaking the world as an all-male paradise; classic American literature, written by men, followed that route in the nineteenth century.⁵² But Americans of the late eighteenth century, steeped as they were in orthodox readings of the Bible, and reminded of them by Milton, could not remake Adam and give the story of the Fall a happier ending without first remaking the woman who had been first in sin. And that is precisely what they did.

Some revamped Eve clearly and consciously, offering new exegeses of Genesis, as did the author of "The Nobility of Woman Kind," who reasoned that "the man gave us death; not the woman. The woman did amiss ignorantly and from deception: But the man knew, that he did amiss." Judith Sargent Murray, writing in the *Massachusetts Magazine* under the pen name "Constantia," offered an even more positive assessment of Eve's brief residence in Eden. Eve's motive in eating the forbidden fruit, Murray suggested, was admirable; she hungered for knowledge. Even though Adam could see that his mate had grown no wiser, he nonetheless tasted the fruit himself. His motive? "A base pusillanimous attachment to a woman! . . . Thus it should seem, that all the arts of the grand deceiver . . . were requisite to mislead our general mother, while the

⁴⁹ See, for example, Cotton Mather, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion; or, The Character and Happiness of a Vertuous Woman* . . . (Cambridge, Mass., 1692), 1. See also Scholten, *Childbearing*, 12.

⁵⁰ George F. Sensabaugh details the spread of Milton's works in America. Although his picture of connubial bliss was occasionally referred to in American publications before the Revolution, it was the final quarter of the century and especially its last decades that brought "American acceptance of Milton's authority on a national scale" (*Milton in Early America* [Princeton, N.J., 1964], 98, and *passim*).

⁵¹ See H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (New York, 1937), chaps. 3 and 4, and Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York, 1977), chap. 4. See also Fliegelman's brilliant analysis of "The Familial Politics of the Fortunate Fall," in *Prodigals*, chap. 3.

⁵² See Leslie A. Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (New York, 1960), and Lawrence, *Studies*.

father of mankind forfeited his own, and relinquished the happiness of posterity, merely in compliance with the blandishments of a female."⁵³ Thus could common assumptions about feminine moral weakness and masculine intellectual strength be turned cleverly on their heads.

Still, most writers who wished to revise popular evaluations of Eve did not take so assertively feminist a tack as to reinterpret the story of the Fall. For one reason, they might be refuted by traditional readings that kept a culpable sensuality, both feminine and masculine, at the center of the story.⁵⁴ Instead, those who were inclined to paint the first mother in more flattering hues tended to focus not so much upon her unhappy departure from Eden as upon her more pleasing qualities when she was still there. Here Americans took their cue from Milton, and in the years just after the Revolution his Eve "began to emerge as a pattern of womanly perfection."⁵⁵ Sometimes an author quoted Milton directly, as did Dr. John Gregory, an Edinburgh physician whose *Legacy* to his daughters was popular in America: "Milton had my idea, when he says of Eve 'Grace was in all her steps. / Heaven in her eye. In every gesture dignity and love'." Samuel Low, author of the play *The Politician Out-witted*, must have assumed that his audience would recognize his source when he quoted the same lines, without attribution, to describe his heroine.⁵⁶

Often Milton's influence was indirect but unmistakable; his "fair angelic Eve," created "for softness . . . and sweet attractive grace,"⁵⁷ served as model for the ideal woman who would display "softness and delicacy of manners, unassuming beauty, unassuming worth, modesty happily blended with good humour." The Miltonic influence is also clear in a poem entitled "Female Character," published in 1792:

Queen of every gentle passion,
Tender sympathy and love;
Perfect work of Heav'nly fashion,
Miniature of charms above.

Love and grace in rich profusion,
Soft'ning man's ferocious soul;

⁵³ *Royal Am. Mag.*, Mar. 1775, 104; "On the Equality of the Sexes," *Mass. Mag.*, Apr. 1790, 224-225. See also "On Woman," *Boston Wkly. Mag.*, July 21, 1804, 153: "if our first parents were at all to be blamed, Adam was by far the most culpable."

⁵⁴ For example, "The Passenger No. XXXI," *Boston Wkly. Mag.*, Sept. 15, 1804, 185, and "On the Forbidden Fruit," *Mass. Mag.*, Oct. 1791, 617-618.

⁵⁵ Sensabaugh, *Milton*, 115.

⁵⁶ Reprinted, without attribution, under the title "A Father's Advice to his Daughters," *Christian's Mag.*, June-July 1789, 191; *The Politician Out-witted*, in Montrose J. Moses, ed., *Representative Plays by American Dramatists* (New York, 1918, 1946), I, 372.

⁵⁷ *Paradise Lost*, bk. 5, line 74, bk. 4, line 298.

All creation's fair conclusion,
Form'd to beautify the whole.⁵⁸

Woman is the last of God's works, created not, as the pre-Miltonic tradition had it, to bring about man's fall, but rather to remind him, after that event, of the paradise they had once shared and hoped still to regain.⁵⁹

Jay Fliegelman has noted that Milton's description of Eve played an important role in "the secularization and feminization of 'grace'" in the eighteenth century as the word took on an aesthetic meaning.⁶⁰ By the same token, woman, "Heav'n's last best gift," promised salvation; she, like Christ, pointed the way toward redemption. Yet it is redemption with a difference, for when sacred history is rewritten in such a way—as American popular writers would have it—that woman is gracious and man has not yet sinned, then we can imagine the time before the Fall when the world was Paradise and our first parents

In naked majesty seemed lords of all,
And worthy seemed, for in their looks divine
The image of their glorious Maker shone . . . ⁶¹

It was to this image of prelapsarian godliness that Americans, in the era just after the American Revolution, responded.

The Republican Wife, then, was Eve, and republican marriage represented Paradise, a veritable "heaven on earth." Taking their model from Milton's hymn to wedded love in Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, American publications described marriage in unabashedly Edenic terms. "The house of the married man is his paradise. . . . In the existence of a married man, there is no termination[;] when death overtakes him, he is only translated from one heaven to another."⁶² Marriage is "the highest state of human felicity, and resembles that of the beneficent beings above." For this reason the choice of a marriage partner was so important. A correspondent to the *Christian's, Scholar's, and Farmer's Magazine* put it simply: "The Choice of a Wife" was one "on which not only [mankind's] present welfare, but even their everlasting felicity may depend."⁶³

⁵⁸ "On Masculine Manners in the Fair Sex," *Boston Wkly. Mag.*, May 5, 1804, 109; *N.Y. Mag.*, May 1792.

⁵⁹ See Diane Kelsey McColley, *Milton's Eve* (Urbana, Ill., 1983).

⁶⁰ Fliegelman, *Prodigals*, 130. See also "On the Difference between Grace and Beauty," *Royal Am. Mag.*, Feb. 1775, 43-45.

⁶¹ *Paradise Lost*, bk. 5, line 19, bk. 4, lines 290-293.

⁶² "On Matrimonial Felicity," *Gent. and Lady's Mag.*, Sept. 1784, 194; "The Felicity of Matrimony," *ibid.*, Aug. 1789, 375-376, reprinted in *N.Y. Mag.*, N.S., Sept. 1797, 474. For direct references to Milton see "On Love," *Ladies Mag.* (Philadelphia), June 1792, 34-35, and Sensabaugh, *Milton*, notes on 42, 111-113, 195-200.

⁶³ "Letter from Eliza," *Pennsylvania Magazine* (Philadelphia), Apr. 1776, 168;

The Edenic vision of marriage, then, served to bridge the anti-patriarchalism of the eighteenth century and the domesticity of the nineteenth. If the patriarchal model of familial relationships was suited to a hierarchically organized society, and if, as Nancy F. Cott has suggested,⁶⁴ domesticity went hand in hand with mid-nineteenth-century democratic liberalism, the Edenic vision fit just as nicely with the canons of republicanism. Like republicanism itself, Edenic republican marriage presented itself as egalitarian. Republican characterizations of marriage echoed with the words *equal*, *mutual*, and *reciprocal*, and marriage was described as a friendship between equals. An essay "Addressed to the Ladies," for example, urged "every young married woman to seek the friend of her heart in the husband of her affection. There, and there only, is that true equality, both of rank and fortune, and cemented by mutual interests, and mutual . . . pledges to be found. . . . There and there only will she be sure to meet with reciprocal confidence, unfeigned attachment and tender solicitude to soothe every care." Indeed, no word better summarizes republican notions of marriage than *friendship*. "Marriage is, or should be, the most perfect state of friendship. Mutual interest produces mutual assistance." Another writer defined the good marriage in almost the same words as "the highest instance of human friendship." In fact, "love" was nothing more than "friendship raised to its highest pitch."⁶⁵

Marriage, quite simply, was friendship exalted. Its pleasures derived from "mutual return of *conjugal love*. . . . When two minds are . . . engaged by the ties of reciprocal sincerity, each alternately receives and communicates a transport that is inconceivable to all, but those that are in this situation." Marriage was intended, another writer concluded, "to be the basis and the cement of those numberless tender sympathies, mutual endearments and interchanges of love between the mutual parties themselves, which make up not the morality only, but even the chief happiness of conjugal life." Marriage was moral because it fused "virtuous love and friendship; the one supplying it with a constant rapture, the other regulating it by the rules of reason." True marriage was quite unlike "those unnatural and disproportionate matches that are daily made upon worldly views, where interest or lust are the only motives."⁶⁶ True marriage was

Christian's Mag., Aug.-Sept. 1790, 351-353. See similarly "On Matrimonial Felicity," *Gent. and Lady's Mag.*, Sept. 1784, 193-194.

⁶⁴ Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven, Conn. 1977), 65.

⁶⁵ "On Friendship," *Christian's Mag.*, June-July 1790, 226; "Praise of Marriage," *Boston Wkly. Mag.*, Apr. 7, 1804, 93; "On Marriage," *General Mag. and Review*, July 1798, 42; "Reflections on Marriage Unions," *N.Y. Mag.*, Oct. 1790, 561. See also "Gossip No. XXXII," *Boston Wkly. Mag.*, July 9, 1803, 149; "Conjugal Love," *Mass. Mag.*, Feb. 1792, 102; and "Philo. No. XIV," *ibid.*, Nov. 1790, 664: "Friendship is the reciprocal attachment of two persons of the same sex. *Love* of two persons of different sexes."

⁶⁶ "Conjugal Love," *Mass. Mag.*, Feb. 1792, 102; "On the Pleasures Arising from a Union Between the Sexes," *Columbian Mag.*, Jan. 1787, 244.

proportionate; put another way, it was symmetrical. Indeed, the mutuality and reciprocity that republicans so prized were inconceivable in an asymmetrical union—the “slavery” of so-called barbaric cultures, in which women were thoroughly subordinated to men.⁶⁷

That republican marriage was symmetrical does not mean that it was fully egalitarian; rather, men and women were opposite sides of the same coin or, as a popular fable had it, two halves of a being that had once been sundered. Neither could be whole until it found its other half.⁶⁸ Nor could the halves be fully moral when separate, for Eve’s love and Adam’s reason were equally necessary to the prelapsarian vision. As heirs to the Enlightenment, American republicans sought the happy medium between—or, more precisely, a fusion of—passion and intellect, head and heart. Eighteenth-century moral philosophy, as it was popularized in American magazines, taught both that passion must be regulated by reason⁶⁹ and that “no real felicity can exist independent of susceptibility and affection, and the heart of him who is cold to the soothing voice of friendship, dead to the melting strains of love, and senseless to the plaintive pleadings of distress, is a mansion only calculated for demoniac spirits, or a cheerless dwelling for disgust and spleen.”⁷⁰ Adam and Eve, reason and love, are each indispensable, and the symmetrical marriage brings them together.

⁶⁷ For the assertion that the subordination or “slavery” of women was characteristic of barbaric cultures see, for example, “On the Treatment of the Fair Sex,” *Lady’s Mag.* (New York), Apr. 1801, 214-215; “An Occasional Letter on the Female Sex,” *Penn. Mag.*, Aug. 1775, 362-364; “Domestic Life of the Arabs,” *General Mag. and Review*, July 1798, 34-36; and “The Influence of the Female Sex on the Enjoyments of Social Life,” *Columbian Mag.*, Mar. 1790, 153-154: “Matrimony, among savages, having no object but propagation and slavery, is a very humbling state for the female sex.” On the other hand, the position of women in societies characterized by commerce, large cities, and an advanced, complex civilization was not necessarily more enviable. See, for example, “Marriage Ceremonies of different Countries Compared,” *ibid.*, June 1787, 491: “The trade of fortune-hunting . . . seem[s] to be confined to the old crowded cities, while the tedious peculiarities of European settlements of fortunes, &c are scarcely understood by the inhabitants of America.” Americans saw their society—and its women—poised somewhere between barbarity and excessive economic and cultural development with its attendant corruptions. See McCoy, *Elusive Republic*, chap. 1. See also “Education,” *Am. Mag.*, Dec. 1787, 22-26. To be sure, the cyclical view of the rise and fall of civilizations, which McCoy illuminates, and the linear Christian eschatology are inconsistent; nonetheless, both sorts of cultural analysis appeared side by side in the era’s magazines. Perhaps the pessimistic cyclical paradigm only made the more hopeful Christian one more appealing.

⁶⁸ “On Marriage,” *General Mag. and Review*, July 1798, 43.

⁶⁹ For example, *Boston Wkly. Mag.*, Sept. 24, 1803, 193, and “On the Government of the Passions,” *Mass. Mag.*, July 1796, 402-404. See also Wills, *Inventing America*.

⁷⁰ “On the Duties which we Owe to Society,” *Lady’s Mag.* (New York), Jan. 1801, 16.

For this reason—that in checking passion and socializing reason the conjugal union made mankind truly virtuous—marriage was the model for society. The single life, according to John Witherspoon, writing as “Epaminondas” in the *Pennsylvania Magazine* on the eve of the Revolution, “narrows the mind and closes the heart.” He asserted unequivocally the “absolute necessity of marriage for the service of the state.”⁷¹ The pure love of marriage formed the basis for “social virtue,” for “while other passions concentrate man on himself, love makes him live in another, subdues selfishness, and reveals to him the pleasure of ministering to the object of his love. . . . The lover becomes a husband, a parent, a citizen.” The “marriage institution,” then, “is the first to produce moral order.” For that reason, “marriage has ever been considered by every wise state the sinew of its strength and the foundation of its true greatness.” Marriage formed the basis of all other relationships, both in the family, because it led to parenthood, and in the society, because it schooled men in the disinterested benevolence that was supposed by republican ideologues to constitute virtue.⁷² In sum, as an essayist in the *Key* put it, “nothing is so honourable as MARRIAGE, nothing so comfortable both to body and mind. . . . It is marriage alone that knits and binds all the sinews of society together and makes the life of man honourable to himself, useful to others, and grateful to the God of nature. . . . Is there anything on earth nearer heaven?” Lest that promise of heaven-on-earth be insufficient to persuade his readers, the writer continued: “That MAN who resolves to live without WOMAN, or that WOMAN who resolves to live without MAN, are [*sic*] ENEMIES TO THE COMMUNITY in which they dwell, INJURIOUS TO THEMSELVES, DESTRUCTIVE TO THE WORLD, APOSTATES TO NATURE, and REBELS AGAINST HEAVEN AND EARTH.”⁷³ The man or woman who proposed to live alone, then, was heretic and traitor both.⁷⁴

Like republicanism, the doctrine of symmetrical marriage subordinated individual interest to the greater good of the whole. Accordingly, marriages based upon interest were to be loathed; true marriage was the model for disinterested benevolence. Unlike the canon of domesticity, in which “women’s self-renunciation was called upon to remedy men’s

⁷¹ “Reflections on Marriage,” *Penn. Mag.*, Sept. 1775, 411, 408, later published as “Letters on Marriage” in *The Works of the Rev. John Witherspoon . . .*, 2d ed. (Philadelphia, 1802), IV, 161-183.

⁷² “On Love,” *N.Y. Mag.*, June 1791, 311; “A Second Vindication of the Rights of Woman,” *Ladies’ Monitor*, Aug. 15, 1801, 12; “The Reflector No. 1,” *ibid.*, Nov. 7, 1801, 92. See also “On Matrimonial Felicity,” *Gent. and Lady’s Mag.*, Sept. 1784, 193-194; “On Love,” *Ladies’ Mag.* (Philadelphia), June 1792, 34-37; “Fashionable Miscellany,” *Baltimore Wkly. Mag.*, July 12, 1800, 91-92; and “On Marriage,” *General Mag. and Review*, July 1798, 41-45.

⁷³ “From the Genius of Liberty,” *Key* (Fredericktown, Md.), Apr. 14, 1798, 105-106.

⁷⁴ Numerous articles attacked bachelors while pitying spinsters. See, for example, *Columbian Mag.*, Apr. 1790, 213-214, and *Mass. Mag.*, July 1791, 410-411.

self-alienation,"⁷⁵ idealized republican marriage required men and women both to display virtue. Male and female were two halves of one whole whose name was concord; the ideal marriage was a scene of prelapsarian harmony. As the author of "On the Necessity of Domestic Concord" noted, "peace" was more important even than "plenty."⁷⁶ In order for "harmony" and "concord" to prevail, husband and wife were to be of one mind; they could not disagree.⁷⁷ To prevent a conflict-filled marriage, one must choose one's mate wisely; probably no consideration was more important than "a similarity of sentiments and dispositions," for where there is "an union of souls, and a consistent harmony of mental ideas . . . discord will keep at an awful distance, and an universal sympathy, productive of an ineffable bliss, will ever attend them. . . . O happiness divine! source of concordant minds!" An essayist in *New York Magazine* expressed the same idea more matter-of-factly: "There cannot be too near an equality, too exact a harmony, betwixt a married couple." Indeed, "the idea of power on either side should be totally banished."⁷⁸

Conjugal affection, then, was not coercive. Nor did it admit of any "selfish or sensual alloy." Marriage was the republic in miniature; it was chaste, disinterested, and free from the exercise of arbitrary power. And, like republican citizens, husband and wife were most likely to find happiness when, as Witherspoon suggested, they shared the same rank, the same education, and the same habits of life.⁷⁹

It is tempting to suppose that the ideology of the republican marriage was but the rhetorical manifestation of the newly affectionate conjugal union, and that both rhetoric and reality represented positive and progressive change.⁸⁰ Yet we must remember that republicanism, like Janus,

⁷⁵ Cott, *Bonds*, 90. The model of self-denying femininity was the mother; the idealization of motherhood, hence, was more characteristic of 19th-century domesticity than of late 18th-century republicanism.

⁷⁶ *Key*, Apr. 7, 1798, 93.

⁷⁷ "Fashionable Miscellany," *Baltimore Wkly. Mag.*, July 12, 1800, 92; "Remarks on Family Government," *Mass. Mag.*, June 1791, 352-353; "A Panegyric on the Delights of Matrimony," *ibid.*, Oct. 1793, 610-612. See also "From a Mother to her Daughter, Just on the Point of Marriage," *Boston Wkly. Mag.*, May 5, 1804, 109-110, and "Conduct of St. Augustin's Mother Monica," *Christian's Mag.*, Oct.-Nov. 1790, 429-430.

⁷⁸ "A Short Sermon on Marriage," *Baltimore Wkly. Mag.*, Apr. 8, 1801, 249, printed earlier in *Ladies Mag.* (Philadelphia), Aug. 1792, 108-110; "On Marriage," *N.Y. Mag.*, N.S., Dec. 1796, 656.

⁷⁹ "On Conjugal Affection," *Ladies Mag.* (Philadelphia), Sept. 1792, 176. "I consider a parity of understanding and temper to be as necessary towards forming a happy marriage, as an equality of years, rank, and fortune" ("Letters," in *Works of Witherspoon*, IV, 169).

⁸⁰ See, for example, D. B. Smith, *Great House*, chap. 4; Trumbach, *Egalitarian Family*, chap. 2; Stone, *Family*, chap. 8; D. S. Smith, "Parental Power," *Jour. Marriage and Family*, XXXV (1973), 419-428; and Ellen K. Rothman, *Hands and Hearts: A History of Courtship in America* (New York, 1984), chap. 1. Of course,

looked to the past as well as to the future; it focused more upon the welfare of the society than the well-being of the individual. Thus it had an implicitly anti-individualistic dimension,⁸¹ one that was exposed whenever conflict arose. We can see that tendency in the ideal of marital concord, which could be—and was—used to legitimate both coverture and the exclusion of women from direct participation in politics. Indeed, the rhetoric of harmony seems almost a gloss upon the doctrine of marital unity—the English common law fiction that in marriage the husband and wife are one, and the husband is the one.⁸² It has puzzled some historians that American Revolutionaries did not jettison coverture along with other pieces of undemocratic British baggage such as primogeniture and entail.⁸³ Yet republican theorists prized harmony above all else; they created the ideal of the affectionate marriage not so much to liberate the individual as to assure concord in the family, the building-block of society.

Republicanism aimed to avoid conflict. Hence, using the same principle that predicted that small republics would be the most harmonious,⁸⁴ those who applied the theory to the family suggested that husband and wife should share similar dispositions, beliefs, and interests, that they should be as one. Even so, conflict might arise, and the recommendations republicans made to restore harmony in such unfortunate cases expose the limitations of the republican model for family and polity alike.

The ideal, of course, was equality; no good republican would have disagreed with the egalitarian sentiments expressed by the woman who styled herself “A Matrimonial Republican.” “The obedience between man and wife,” she wrote, “is, or ought to be mutual.”⁸⁵ The catch was in the “ought to be,” for here the weaknesses in the republican ideal show through. What, for example, was a wife with an errant husband to do? Although it was certainly true that “man has no more right to sin with impunity than woman,” husbands seemed to fall more often, and it became a wife’s duty to lure her errant mate back to rectitude with “the charm of good humour and uncomplaining sweetness.” In other words, only

heightened expectations of marriage may have worked against the end they sought to secure; see Lewis, *Pursuit of Happiness*, 187-204, and Cott, *Bonds*, 76-83.

⁸¹ Wood, *Creation*, esp. 70-75. Consider also J.G.A. Pocock’s famous description of the American Revolution as “the last great act of the Renaissance” (“Virtue and Commerce in the Eighteenth Century,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, III [1972], 120).

⁸² For coverture see Norma Basch, *In the Eyes of the Law: Women, Marriage, and Property in Nineteenth-Century New York* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1982), chaps. 1 and 2, and “Equity vs. Equality: Emerging Concepts of Women’s Political Status in the Age of Jackson,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, III (1983), 297-318. For the justification for excluding women from politics see, for example, “Remarks on Female Politicians,” *Ladies’ Monitor*, May 29, 1802, 324-325.

⁸³ For example, Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, 119-121, 135-136.

⁸⁴ Wood, *Creation*, 58, 356. See also “Reflections on Marriage Unions,” *N.Y. Mag.*, Oct. 1790, 561-562.

⁸⁵ “On Matrimonial Obedience,” *Ladies Mag.* (Philadelphia), July 1792, 66.

redoubled feminine virtue could reclaim a husband from masculine vice. "Dispute not with him, be the occasion what it will," advised one writer.⁸⁶ Better to let errors go unremarked, warned another, than to "strike too often the unharmonious string." Indeed, "the best way of a married woman to carry her points is to yield sometimes."⁸⁷ Harmony, then, took precedence over equality; in the interest of concord a woman would sometimes have to forbear.

But why not the husband? In a truly reciprocal marriage would not the two parties compromise? Almost all essayists who addressed the issue of conflict in marriage argued that it was the wife who had to bend. The responsibility for anchoring marriage fell disproportionately to women because they were, supposedly, more compliant than men,⁸⁸ or, at least, they would find it "necessary, for political purposes, to consider man as the superior authority."⁸⁹ The symmetrical marriage thus gave way, under

⁸⁶ "The Gossip No. XV," *Boston Wkly. Mag.*, Feb. 5, 1803, 61; "Rules and Maxims for promoting Matrimonial Happiness," *Gent. and Lady's Mag.*, May 1784, 28. Although occasional articles and stories describe the failings of bad wives, most focus upon deficient husbands. For a description of a bad wife see "The Extravagant Wife: An American Tale," *Mass. Mag.*, July 7, 1791, 425-426. For bad husbands see "The Matron," *Gent. and Lady's Mag.*, Dec. 1789, 581-583; "Genuine Letter from an Injured Wife to Her Husband," *Christian's Mag.*, June-July 1789, 242-243; "The History of Adrastus and Camilla," *Ladies' Monitor*, Mar. 20, 1802, 241; "A Female Character," *Ladies Mag.* (Philadelphia), Sept. 1792, 182; "Conjugal Prudence," *N.Y. Mag.*, Mar. 1791, 127-128; and "Harriot," *Mass. Mag.*, Jan. 1789, 3-7.

⁸⁷ "Advice to Married Ladies," *Mass. Mag.*, June 1793, 331-332; "A Letter to a very good natured Lady married to a very ill natured Man," *Christian's Mag.*, Aug.-Sept. 1789, 319-320.

⁸⁸ "Woman: An Apologue," *Columbian Phenix*, July 1800, 438-439. See also "Letter to good natured Lady," *Christian's Mag.*, Aug.-Sept. 1789, 319-320; Wm. Alexander, M.D., "On the Happy Influence Arising from Female Society," *Mass. Mag.*, July 1795, 220-223; and "Female Biography," *Baltimore Wkly. Mag.*, Aug. 9, 1800, 125.

⁸⁹ "An Address to the Ladies," *Am. Mag.*, Mar. 1788, 245. There was no consensus on whether those differences between men and women that led to the expectation that women would defer to male authority were innate or merely convenient. Some writers were themselves uncertain, as was "The Gentleman at Large," who concluded that women were morally equal to men; that their minds had a "nice and delicate texture," which proved that "the situation for which Heaven designed them in this world is of a nature the most benevolent and engaging," while "the more rugged and invidious offices of life were appropriated to man, as being better suited to his firm and sturdy disposition"; and that women should "voluntarily" adopt certain responsibilities in the home (*Columbian Phenix*, May 1800, 266-269). Most writers, however, seem to have adopted a symmetrical, different-but-equal model of gender, which could manifest itself—as early as 1788—as a fully articulated version of "separate spheres." (See "An Address to the Ladies," *Am. Mag.*, Mar. 1788, 241-246; Miss M. Warner, "Rights of Woman," *Boston Wkly. Mag.*, Oct. 30, 1802, 2; Miss P. W. Jackson, "Concluding Address, at exhibition at Mrs. Rowson's Academy," *ibid.*, Oct. 29, 1803, 2-3; and "Gentleman

very little pressure, to a disproportionate one in which the wife, in order to maintain domestic tranquillity, was expected to defer.

Deference, of course, was the solution republicans offered for the problem of conflict in the polity; persons deficient in judgment or inferior in status, they believed, should simply yield to those of superior wisdom. Yet although, as Wood has shown, Federalists offered the Constitution as a “republican remedy” for the republican vice of disharmony, no similar rearrangement was forthcoming for the family. Indeed, as Americans showed increasing acceptance of conflict in the market and the polity, they became less willing to tolerate it at home.⁹⁰

The insistence upon feminine deference revealed fears about conflict in the society and nation, and not merely concern about unhappy marriages. Indeed, very few of the essays that enjoined women to complaisance mentioned those character flaws we might expect women to have confronted most frequently in their mates: irritability, distasteful habits, slovenliness, insensitivity, an inability to earn an adequate income, or even the arbitrary exercise of power. Rather, the single failing that drew the most censure—and also the most extravagant claims for the power of female influence—was infidelity. Stories with titles like “The Way to Reclaim Him. A Moral Tale” purported to show how supreme feminine virtue could recall an errant husband to the path of rectitude. In that story, as in such another as “Conjugal Prudence,” the wronged wife won back her wayward husband by embracing, literally, his mistress and illegitimate offspring, and by insisting upon an education for the children and an annuity (and, implicitly, banishment) for the mistress. Such acts of generosity never failed. The husband in the former story clasped his wife to his breast, “murmured out . . . ‘Excellent woman! matchless wife!’” and promised “to remain immutably attached to her alone to the last moment of his existence.” Similarly, the husband in the latter exclaimed, “Thou heavenly woman! . . . is it *thus* thou upbraidest me for my infidelity to the most amiable woman that ever existed! O, my love, forgive!—but that’s impossible! I am, I will be only yours’.”⁹¹

The authors of such stories seem to be exploring the farthest reaches of

at Large,” *Columbian Phenix*, May 1800, 266-269.) But because these distinctions were grounded in a religio-cultural metaphor of the first parents, rather than in science, they were quite flexible, could be put to any number of uses, and were quite inconsistent. For an analysis of the “paradoxes and contradictions” in late eighteenth-century depictions of femininity, see Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago, 1984), chap. 1, quotation on p. 15.

⁹⁰ Wood, *Creation*, chap. 11. Consider the premise of Carl N. Degler, *At Odds: Women and the Family in America from the Revolution to the Present* (New York, 1980); Cott, *Bonds*, 98-99; and Tocqueville’s classic analysis of the origins of individualism in *Democracy in America*, ed. Phillips Bradley (New York, 1980), II, 98-99.

⁹¹ *Gent. and Lady’s Mag.*, Nov. 1784, 299-302, quotation on p. 302; *N.Y. Mag.*, Mar. 1791, 127-128, quotation on p. 128.

self-abasing virtue; they imagine the most extreme instances of domestic cruelty a wife might endure in order to see whether the depths of depravity may be exceeded by the heights of virtue. When the answer is yes, the resolution takes the form of a conversion, with the husband confessing his sins and the wife playing the part, in the words of another contrite fictional husband, of "my guardian angel sent by heaven to prevent my ruin."⁹² Stripped of her original culpability, Eve is easily transformed into Christ's surrogate, able to work a sinner's "reformation." "Trust me," the wronged wife says. "I assure you, that search the habitable globe, you will meet with no woman more inclined to serve, love, obey, and oblige you, than your Emilia."⁹³ Like Christ, the wife has to suffer, and like him, she redeems.

It was, however, equally possible for women to suffer yet not redeem. That was the sad fate of the heroine of Susanna Rowson's *Sarah; or, The Exemplary Wife*, a novel in which "virtue is represented, in all her native simplicity and beauty; and vice . . . is exhibited in her own proper ugliness and deformity." Although "the story is far from being improbable,"⁹⁴ it is really a parable, with virtue pitted against vice. Virtue is represented by Sarah, a lovely young woman who is forced by mercenary relatives to wed a reprobate, somewhat as if Clarissa had been made, against her will, to marry Lovelace. Although her husband kept a mistress, even bringing her into the home he shared with his wife, and although he despised Sarah for her goodness, she never wavered in her patience, charity, or virtue. When her husband bankrupted himself and even her clothing was claimed by his creditors, she entered into service to support him and herself. And when she discovered his illegitimate child, "said she calmly . . . 'if the child owes its being to you, give orders that it be brought home, and I will see it is properly taken care of; but let me entreat you not to add to the offence already committed against religion and morality, the unpardonable one of leaving your offspring to perish.'" Whereupon the errant husband exploded, "'D—n—t—n. . . Of all the plagues a man can have, a moralizing, sentimental, canting, hypocritical wife is the worst.'" After years of such trials, Sarah died, secure in her conviction that "even in thought she had never dishonoured her husband." Thereupon he married his mistress.⁹⁵ Here there is no conversion; virtue will not prevail. Nevertheless, "who of

⁹² "Conjugal Affection," *Gent. and Lady's Mag.*, Feb. 1789, 4. The repentant husband wished "every man blessed with a wife like thee to break his fall whenever he deviated from virtue's paths."

⁹³ "Genuine Letter from an Injured Wife to her Husband," *Christian's Mag.*, June-July 1789, 242-243. See also "Harriot," *Mass. Mag.*, Jan. 1789, 3-7; "A Female Character," *Ladies Mag.* (Philadelphia), Sept. 1792, 182; "Emilia," *N.Y. Mag.*, Oct. 1793, 592-595; and "History of Adrastus and Camilla," *Ladies' Monitor*, Mar. 20, 1802, 241.

⁹⁴ As announced in *Boston Wkly. Mag.*, June 16, 1804, 136. The novel was serialized in the magazine in 1804 as "Sincerity, a Novel, by a 'Lady of Massachusetts,'" but published as *Sarah* (Boston, 1813).

⁹⁵ *Boston Wkly. Mag.*, May 19, 1804, 120, June 30, 1804, 144.

common reflection but would prefer the death of Sarah, resigned as she was, and upheld by faith and hope, to all the splendors, wealth and honors ever heaped upon the heroine in the last pages of a novel” in which a heroine met only an earthly reward?⁹⁶ To put it another way, Susanna Rowson expressed doubt about whether feminine virtue *could* prevail in a corrupt world.

The doctrine of the Republican Wife suggested that a good wife could influence a susceptible man; *Sarah* raised the question whether she could reclaim, as well, a man who was confirmed in viciousness. The answer was that she could not. Here was a fundamental dilemma for the new nation: how could virtue be exacted from the vicious? Republican ideology offered a number of plausible ways to encourage the good to be more so; chief among them were education, benevolent reform, and female influence.⁹⁷ But it faced an insurmountable obstacle when it confronted men who were beyond all hope of reformation. The problem was infidelity, not merely the faithlessness of a spouse but apostasy itself—the unpardonable sin; for it, republicanism had no cure.

Republican advocacy of virtue was powerless before persons who had no conscience. How bedeviling this problem was can be seen when we examine the conventional seduction story. Tales such as *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* may be considered as not very subtle warnings to young women without dowries that their value lay in their virginity; if they would be sought after on the marriage market, they must keep that commodity intact. The sentimental tale of seduction thus has been seen as an instrument of bourgeois respectability and middle-class conformity.⁹⁸ Such a view is not untrue, for surely no early nineteenth-century girl enhanced her marriage prospects by squandering her virginity. Chastity *was* esteemed, but for republican as much as bourgeois reasons. Consider “Reflections on Chastity, or Female Honour,” a brief definition printed in at least three magazines before 1800: “What Bravery is in man, Chastity is in woman. This virtue, by making them triumph over every wicked attempt to dishonour them, bestows on them, as the first reward of

⁹⁶ Rowson, *Sarah*, iii.

⁹⁷ On education see Kerber, *Women of the Republic*, chap. 7; Norton, *Liberty's Daughters*, chap. 9; and Ann D. Gordon, “The Young Ladies Academy of Philadelphia,” in Carol Ruth Berkin and Mary Beth Norton [eds.], *Women of America: A History* (Boston, 1979), 68-91. For benevolent activities see Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York, 1984), chap. 7. For examples of women's benevolent organizations see Fred J. Hood, *Reformed America: The Middle and Southern States, 1783-1837* (University, Ala., 1980), 151, 153, 167, and “Religious,” *Boston Wkly. Mag.*, Dec. 15, 1804, 29.

⁹⁸ See Christopher Hill, “Clarissa Harlowe and Her Times,” *Essays in Criticism*, V (1955), 330-331; Wendy Martin, “Profile: Susanna Rowson, Early American Novelist,” *Women's Studies*, II (1974), 6-7; and Ian Pierre Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson, and Fielding* (Berkeley, Calif., 1957). See also Cott, “Passionlessness,” *Signs*, IV (1978), 219-236.

victory, an universal esteem."⁹⁹ Once again we see the symmetrical expectations of men and women; in this case, chastity is the feminine version of the absolute standard of courage expected of Revolutionary War soldiers. For patriots like the Reverend Robert Cooper, cowardice was sin; thus he warned in 1775 that "if . . . you would escape deep guilt before God, and lasting contempt among men, forward you must go. . . . You have, in a word, no alternative, but either to venture your lives bravely, or attempt to save them ignominiously; to run the hazard of dying like heroes, or be certain of living like cowards."¹⁰⁰ Bravery, like chastity, was an absolute; it allowed not the slightest deviation nor tolerated any taint.

Brave men and chaste women were expected to "triumph over every wicked attempt to dishonour them." What Charles Royster has said of this Revolutionary attachment to exacting standards of bravery applies to chastity as well: it reflected an evangelical tendency to establish dichotomies between good and evil, salvation and grace, God and Satan. To waver in one's courage was to fall from grace; similarly, to surrender one's chastity was to sin. Americans of the Revolutionary era held out an impossible standard of purity for women and men both. Yet the Continental army, as Royster has shown, would come to a more workable notion of human capability, as would the political theorists who framed the Constitution. Standards of female virtue, however, fully as unrealistic as the expectation that no soldier would ever feel fear or no citizen advance his own interest, only became more rigid.¹⁰¹

In many ways chastity was a fit emblem for republicanism, which, when infused with evangelical ardor, could demand absolute and undeviating virtue from its citizens. Hence we must read the era's popular literature of seduction not merely as cautionary tales addressed to young women but also as political tracts in which men and women explored the possibilities for virtue in a corrupt world. Surely it is significant that the most popular novel of the early national period—indeed, the most popular American novel of all until the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*—was *Charlotte*

⁹⁹ *Royal Am. Mag.*, Feb. 1775, 61; *Mass. Mag.*, Oct. 1791, 629-630; *Key*, Feb. 17, 1798, 44.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Royster, *Revolutionary People*, 225.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 27-31, 47-49, 224-230, and *passim*. For other discussions of chastity see "On the loss of Chastity," *N.Y. Mag.*, N.S., Apr. 1797, 213; "The Gossip No. 25," *Boston Wkly. Mag.*, May 7, 1803, 113; "On Female Chastity," *ibid.*, Nov. 24, 1804, 18; and "An Address to the Ladies," *Am. Mag.*, Mar. 1788, 241-246: "chastity really exists in the mind; and when this fountain is pure, the words and actions that flow from it will be chaste and delicate" (p. 242). The best discussion of the origins of the ideal of chastity is Cott, "Passionlessness," *Signs*, IV (1978), 219-236. There is some debate about how fully American women abided by this ideal. (See, for example, Carl N. Degler, "What Ought to Be and What Was: Women's Sexuality in the Nineteenth Century," *AHR*, LXXIX [1974], 1467-1490, and Peter Gay, *The Bourgeois Experience: Victoria to Freud*. Vol. I: *Education of the Senses* [New York, 1984].) But there is no question about the pervasiveness of the ideology.

Temple, Susanna Rowson's classic tale of seduction and abandonment.¹⁰² In this novel it takes not one but two designing men to seduce Charlotte from the path of virtue. The work is begun by Montraville, a Lovelace type who is drawn to the innocent young woman he ensnares but is unwilling to make a disadvantageous match; it is completed by his "friend" Belcour, whose only apparent motivation is to destroy both Charlotte and her faithless lover. Under such an assault, Charlotte's innocence stands not a chance.¹⁰³

Like Charlotte and her forerunner Clarissa Harlowe, the heroines of the sentimental tales of seduction are all sympathetic. Eliza Wharton, *The Coquette*, seemed "to possess both the virtues and the graces"; her weaknesses were "an air of gaiety in her appearance and deportment" and a fatal naïveté.¹⁰⁴ Indeed, the flaws ascribed to the unfortunate heroines were traits that republicans usually valued: "a heart . . . formed of sensibility"; "unsuspecting innocence"; "innocent herself, she expected to find others so"; a mind "pure and unsullied"; "innocence and simplicity"; "amiable, ingenuous and sensible."¹⁰⁵ Pure, innocent, without guile, such young women are nothing less than contemporary versions of Eve; they are endowed with her attributes and given her signs. The unfortunate Amelia, for example, is "one of the fairest blossoms in the garden of society," while Almira is "as beautiful as the daughters of Paradise, as gentle as the breezes of spring; her mind was spotless, and her manners artless."¹⁰⁶ Such innocence fell once from Paradise, and it was destined to fall again and again in countless tales of seduction in the early republic.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Susanna Haswell Rowson, *Charlotte Temple: A Tale of Truth* (Philadelphia, 1794). For the popularity of *Charlotte Temple* see Francis W. Halsey's introduction to the 1905 New York edition, and Fliegelman, *Prodigals*, 261-262.

¹⁰³ As Fliegelman notes, Charlotte's parents—who are cast in the affectionate, post-patriarchal mold—might, in theory, have protected her, and in falling, she broke their hearts; but paternalism, no more than patriarchalism, represented an acceptable option for post-Revolutionary Americans (*Prodigals*, 261-262).

¹⁰⁴ Foster, *Coquette*, 62.

¹⁰⁵ "Copy of a Letter from Miss ——— to M——," *Penn. Mag.*, Mar. 1775, 114; "Innocence Betrayed," *Lady's Miscellany* (New York), Aug. 24, 1811, 282; "Story of Philenia," *Mass. Mag.*, Dec. 1791, 729; "Maltilda," *Key*, Apr. 14, 1798, 107; "The Fatal Effects of Seduction," *Gent. and Lady's Mag.*, June 1789, 250, "Melancholy Tale of Seduction," *Mass. Mag.*, Apr. 1795, 41.

¹⁰⁶ "The Sorrows of Amelia," *Baltimore Wkly. Mag.*, July 5, 1800, 87; "Treachery and Infidelity Punished," *Gent. and Lady's Mag.*, Aug. 1789, 340.

¹⁰⁷ Other seduction tales include "Gossip No. LIV," *Boston Wkly. Mag.*, Feb. 18, 1804, 65; "Advice to the Unguarded Fair of this Metropolis," *Gent. and Lady's Mag.*, Nov. 1789, 547-548; "Passenger No. XI," *Boston Wkly. Mag.*, Dec. 10, 1803, 25; and "The Gossip No. XXV," *ibid.*, May 7, 1803, 113. See also the stories in n. 105. For different readings of the literature of seduction, in particular *The Coquette*, see Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (New York, 1986), esp. chap. 6, and Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "Reinterpreting Antebellum Culture" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Organization of American Historians, 1987).

We have seen that feminine influence had its limits; no wife could expect to triumph over a thoroughly corrupted man on this side of the grave. Likewise, feminine innocence was at the mercy of masculine vice. No matter how many times the story of the Fall was reenacted, it came out the same way, as a correspondent to the *Gentleman and Lady's Town and Country Magazine* was well aware: "Most angelic and ever-admir'd blossoms of earthly eminence—how few are the instances of thy pure innocence ever reaching the summit of that bliss, uninjured, for which thy Maker intended it." Why? Because of "the wicked designs of artful men, more ravenous than the hungry lions, which go about seeking whom they may devour." Thus he cautioned "the fair daughters of Eve," but could his warning against the "seducers of female excellence" have any more success than God's to Adam and Eve?¹⁰⁸

How closely the seduction story was modeled upon that of the Fall is even more apparent in a tale entitled "Treachery and Infidelity Punished." Almira, the picture of innocence and "as beautiful as the daughters of Paradise," is seduced by one Lothario: "Oh! the base dissembler—had ingratiated himself too far in her affections: with fondness she listened to his deceitful tales, and with too great avidity devoured his insinuating discourse."¹⁰⁹ Like her mother Eve, Almira fell, for like Eve, she faced the most artful of deceivers, Satan himself, barely disguised.

Without question, most of the fictional seducers are satanic; they are described in terms that leave no doubt about their true nature. Seducers are "those reptiles, those anamacules [*sic*], who really come under the class of non-descripts in creation." Even when the deceiver is not a snake, he is animal-like, "a lordly brute [who] fixed his cruel fangs" on one who was "gay . . . lovely . . . innocent . . . happy."¹¹⁰ The seducer "stalks through the polite world like a satiated lion, who wants only the impulse of hunger to sacrifice another victim." The "vile seducer" is indeed subhuman, for he lacks the ability to love. Instead, he perverts affection, preying upon the credulity of the innocent; "falsehood guides [his] tongue, whilst an infamous baseness, under a plausible appearance of love or friendship conceals a heart destitute of every feeling."¹¹¹ Indeed, the seducer is the enemy of love, and much like the Devil who envied Adam and Eve their innocent bliss, he plots its destruction.

Hannah Foster modeled Eliza Wharton's seducer at least as much on Satan as on Lovelace. Jealous of the minister Eliza seems to prefer and angered by her virtuous friends, Sanford sets out to trap the lovely girl who has caught his eye. The responsibility is hers, he claims: "If she will

¹⁰⁸ "Advice to the Unguarded Fair of this Metropolis," *Gent. and Lady's Mag.*, Nov. 1789, 547-548.

¹⁰⁹ "Treachery and Infidelity Punished," *ibid.*, Aug. 1789, 340-341.

¹¹⁰ "Gossip No. XXV," *Boston Wkly. Mag.*, July 30, 1803, 161; "The Seducer," *ibid.*, May 18, 1805, 117.

¹¹¹ "On Seduction," *Mass. Mag.*, May 1792, 308; "General Characteristics of Modern Novels," *Boston Wkly. Mag.*, Aug. 24, 1805, 174; "A Virtuous and Prudent Conduct Recommended," *Ladies Mag.* (Philadelphia), Nov. 1792, 265.

play with a lion, let her beware of his paw, I say."¹¹² *Charlotte Temple's* Belcour is cut from the same cloth, as are Sidney in "Charles and Amelia, or the Unfortunate Lovers," and Orlando, who contrives Narcissa's fall. In each case, most of the plot is devoted to the stratagems used to "ensnare" the heroine's virtue.¹¹³ Such men, surely, are beyond the compass of normal experience. Each is attracted only to the most singularly virtuous of girls and is not satisfied until he has succeeded in ruining her. Judith Sargent Murray wrote that it was hard to "conceive of turpitude so enormous, as that which must excite a being, *deliberately to perpetrate the murder of the peace of a fellow creature, without a single apparent motive to stimulate a deed of such atrocity.*"¹¹⁴ But it should not have been difficult at all; loathsome as the creature was, his prototype could be found in Genesis.

For this reason—that seduction tales essentially reenact the Fall, with the victim cast as Eve and the seducer as Satan himself—we should not read such tales too literally. While they certainly reinforced emerging Victorian standards of sexuality, it is doubtful that this was the primary objective. Rather, they represent another chapter in the early nineteenth century's secularization of religion. In them, the seducer is a secularized—but nonetheless recognizable—version of Satan.¹¹⁵ The real subject of the seduction stories is not whether young girls should resist sexual temptation, but what hope innocence has in a corrupt world. The answer was grim, and mankind's—not merely Eve's—repeated fall had grave implications not only for women but for all of American society. That was the lesson of "The Seducer: Addressed to the Fair Daughters of America." Its author, typically, was incredulous that a being so depraved as the "base seducer" could exist: "Such a one is a monster in creation. . . . To obtain his desires, he practices every art of dissimulation, and he does not hesitate to violate the most solemn engagements. Falsehood and perjury become familiar to him. . . . Virtue is sacrificed to his lust." Yet it is not only his innocent victim who suffers, for "the peace of individuals, families, and societies is destroyed. . . . Such are more dangerous to meet than bears bereaved of their whelps. They ought like ravenous wolves to be hunted from civilized society."¹¹⁶ The satanic seducer was an enemy to society, the snake in the grass of the infant republic.

¹¹² Foster, *Coquette*, 82.

¹¹³ Rowson, *Charlotte Temple; General Mag. and Review*, July 1798, 33-36; "The History of Narcissa," *Mass. Mag.*, Mar. 1792, 179-181.

¹¹⁴ Murray, *The Gleaner* (Boston, 1798), II, 55. See also "Melancholy Tale of Seduction," *Mass. Mag.*, Apr. 1795, 40-42; "An Admonition to those who glory in seducing the affection of the fair, and then deserting them," *Columbian Mag.*, Nov. 1792, 303; and "On the Power of Love," *Ladies Mag.* (Philadelphia), Nov. 1792, 255-256.

¹¹⁵ See also Wood, "Conspiracy and Paranoid Style," *WMQ*, 3d Ser., XXXIX (1982), 420-421.

¹¹⁶ *Baltimore Wkly. Mag.*, Mar. 25, 1801, 231.

To the list of republicanism's stock villains, to the tyrannical ruler and the designing courtier, we thus must add several other names: those of the coxcomb, the coquette, and—most of all—the vile seducer. All threatened the consensual union that served as the metaphor of what republicans wanted their society to be. Yet if republicanism found ways to vanquish the tyrant and banish the sycophant, it was powerless when confronted by this most insinuating and devilish seducer. He put republicanism, as a system of belief, on trial—and he won. He revealed republicanism's fatal flaw; although it could imagine ways by which reasonably virtuous men and women could make each other more so and might live with each other in harmony, it was utterly baffled by confirmed depravity. In some ways, republicanism represented a quarrel with Genesis. So long as republican-minded men and women could rewrite sacred history in such a way that the Fall never took place and Eve was never tempted, they could imagine themselves inhabiting an earthly paradise, living with their mates in a prelapsarian bliss. But the men and women who were the heirs of the Reformation could never fully forget the Fall; they knew that, when tempted by a deceiver of satanic proportions, humankind would fall and fall again.

The best solution they could devise for the inevitability of sin was the metaphor of republican marriage, in which like-minded and virtuous men and women would guide each other's steps along the paths of rectitude. Yet in their fiction they were drawn irresistibly to the seduction story, and there virtue—and the republic—fell. Most of this discourse, naturally, was expressed in codes; because it was so metaphorical, we cannot read it literally. Clearly, it was not merely sexual lust that republicans found so threatening, but immoderate desires of all kinds, ambition and self-interest chief among them. The vile seducer represented republicanism's inability to come to terms with power, which it tended to equate with evil.

Still, because women figured so prominently in it, we must ask what bearing the literature of republican marriage had for actual republican women. We see embedded in these works many of the themes that historians have already exposed: a growing acceptance of affection as the only proper basis of marriage, increasing respect for feminine virtue, the feminization of religion, the idealization of chastity, and, finally, a growing interest in the possibilities for feminine influence. These themes are all compressed into the person of the Republican Wife: affectionate, virtuous, chaste, and capable of enormous moral authority over her husband. The Republican Wife represented, in the ideology at least, a real and important role. Yet even as an image, she was limited. Indeed, she led to a dead end, for her capability always depended upon masculine susceptibility. She had no more power than man allowed, and even if republican doctrine suggested that men ought to welcome feminine influence, that doctrine held no sway over those who did not subscribe to its credo. That generalization, of course, describes the fundamental weakness in republicanism; it had no power over those who were not or did not want to be virtuous.

In that sense republicanism served women no more poorly than it did men: all were baffled by unalloyed vice. Even though republicanism enhanced woman's status and legitimated improvements in her education as well as her entry into benevolent reform movements,¹¹⁷ it also placed implicit checks upon her power. And it confronted her with the image of the seduced maid, condemned to fall repeatedly in tale after tale, seemingly incapable of learning from her experience. Women who wanted more status, influence, or power would have to look for another model. Thus the ideal of the wife would give way, by perhaps 1830, to that of the mother. Men might not be malleable, but children were, and they seemed to offer a more promising opportunity for the exercise of influence. Yet before that transition could be effected, the many elements that brought it about would have to fall into place: not merely a sentimental conception of motherhood—already widely shared by the end of the eighteenth century, as Ruth Bloch has shown—but also the removal of the father's place of work from the home, new views on the nature of childhood and child rearing, and, perhaps most important of all, an acceptance of childhood conversion.¹¹⁸ This shifting of emphasis from woman-as-wife to that of woman-as-mother had important implications for reform, for it rested upon the assumption that women had a special role to play as mothers and that, consequently, they represented a separate interest.

This transition in the conceptualization of woman's nature and her role would have parallels in other aspects of early national life. The 1820s and 1830s may represent a watershed, for not only would the Republican Wife be replaced by the Victorian mother, but in other ways as well the republican synthesis would dissolve, yielding to a more fragmented social vision. In politics, the semblance of an era of good feelings would give way to the second party system. Reform, also, would pass on to a new and more militant phase, beyond benevolence; vague plans for colonization or the eventual abolition of slavery would yield to immediatism, and hopeful schemes to "civilize" the Indian tribes would be replaced by the reality of the reservation. The republic of harmony proved ephemeral; it simply could not work, for it faltered in the face of intransigent slaveholders, Indians who did not want to be white, drunkards who would not give up the bottle, and, most simply, men who would not reform. When confronted by such enormous obstacles, the Republican Wife, like the theory that begot her and like the original woman in whose image she was cast, tasted of the fruit of knowledge and, inevitably, fell.

¹¹⁷ See n. 97, above.

¹¹⁸ See Bloch, "Feminine Ideals," *Feminist Studies*, IV (1978); Anne Louise Kuhn, *The Mother's Role in Childhood Education: New England Concepts, 1830-1860* (New Haven, Conn., 1947); Mary P. Ryan, *The Empire of the Mother: American Writing about Domesticity, 1830-1860* (New York, 1982); Bernard Wishy, *The Child and the Republic: The Dawn of Modern American Child Nurture* (Philadelphia, 1968); Cott, *Bonds*; and Douglas, *Feminization of Culture*.