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**Imagined Intimacies:**

**Women's Writing, Community, and Affiliation**

**in Eighteenth-Century North America**

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**Imagined Intimacies: Women's Writing, Community, and Affiliation in  
Eighteenth-Century North America**

**by**

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**Imagined Intimacies: Women's Writing, Community, and Affiliation in  
Eighteenth-Century North America**

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**The University of Texas at Austin, 2010**

**Supervisors: William J. Scheick and Lisa L. Moore**

**Abstract:** My dissertation argues for a fundamental reorientation of our approach to public intimacy and identifies a lushly pragmatic rhetorical schema via which black, white, and Native women enter colonial American public life. I contend that these early American women employ the language of personal intimacy -- familial, spiritual, domestic -- to craft wide-ranging public interventions. Through references to their private affiliations, they associate themselves with others who share their religious, economic, political, and social concerns and thereby forge semi-public communities. I demonstrate that because such language retains women's often un-egalitarian and un-affective experiences of quotidian intimacy and therefore appears "natural" for women, it masks the radicalism, formal and substantive, of their interventions. Thus, in making public issues intimate, these women discreetly authorize and advance their interests. They use the same techniques whether they are preaching religious principles, positing alternative political models, or promoting preferred agricultural commodities. I rely upon

an interdisciplinary body of scholarship, including studies of anthropology, religion, and economic, political, and regional history, to produce dense local studies. Yet, since I interrogate an array of authors and genres -- published and manuscript poetry, diplomatic and legal documents, commonplace books, spiritual diaries, autobiographies, and letters - - my project synthesizes those studies into a history that is multi-denominational, multi-racial, multi-class, and multi-regional.

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## INTRODUCTION

### **"We Associate Ourselves": Women's Writing, Intimacy, and Affiliation in Public Life**

In a 1780 broadside entitled *The Sentiments of an American Woman*, elite Philadelphian Esther de Berdt Reed published a plan by which women, in a collective expression of gratitude and patriotism, could donate money directly to soldiers fighting in the American army against the British. After identifying amongst her fellow American women a "universal" desire to assist the revolutionary cause, she rousingly situates that desire within a classical and biblical history of named and unnamed women:

Our ambition is kindled by the fame of those heroines of antiquity, who have rendered our sex illustrious, and have proved to the universe, that, if the weakness of our Constitution, if opinion and manners did not forbid us to march to glory by the same paths as the Men, we should at least equal, and sometimes surpass them in our love for public good[. . .] I call to mind with enthusiasm and with admiration, all those acts of courage, of constancy and patriotism, which history has transmitted us: The people favoured by Heaven, preserved from destruction by the virtues, the zeal and the resolution of Deborah, of Judith, of Esther! The fortitude of the



mother of the Macchabees, in giving up her sons to die before her eyes: Rome saved from the fury of a victorious enemy by the efforts of Volumnia, and other Roman Ladies: So many famous sieges where the Women have been forgetting the weakness of their sex, building new walls, digging trenches with their feeble hands, furnishing arms to their defenders, they themselves darting the missile weapons on the enemy, resigning the ornaments of their apparel, and their fortune, to fill the public treasury, and to hasten the deliverance of their country; burying themselves under its ruins; throwing themselves into the flames rather than submit to the disgrace of humiliation before a proud enemy. (1)

De Berdt Reed then spans the distance between such rather mythical (and, in some cases, fictional)<sup>1</sup> women to her present moment by identifying more recent "heroines" within the ranks of European royalty:

Born for liberty, disdaining to bear the irons of a tyrannic Government, we associate ourselves to the grandeur of those Sovereigns, cherished and revered, who have held with so much splendour the scepter of the greatest States, The Batildas, the Elizabeths, the Maries, the Catharines, who have extended the empire of liberty, and contented to reign by sweetness and justice, have broken the chains of slavery, forged by tyrants in the times of ignorance and barbarity.

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<sup>1</sup> Volumnia is a character from William Shakespeare's play *Coriolanus*. She saves Rome by urging her exiled son to cease a vengeful siege upon the city. Judith is the titular figure of the apocryphal Book of Judith. The book is considered to be fictional due to multiple inaccuracies about its purported setting. See Carey A. Moore's "Judith, The Book of" in *The Oxford Companion to the Bible*, edited by Bruce M. Metzger and Michael D. Coogan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

She concludes this portion of her proposal by noting the sacrifices of "Spanish Women" on behalf of their "Sovereign" and by praising Joan of Arc who led the French in battle against the "the ancestors of those same British, whose odious yoke we have just shaken off."

These two introductory paragraphs, a fourth of the entire document, indicate that de Berdt Reed believes one of her primary rhetorical tasks is to justify women's participation in the public realm of politics and war. That she initially does so through a millennia-long genealogy of heroic feminine intervention suggests she believes there is something predictable and moral about women's involvement and that it is only artificial "opinion and manners" and women's "weak[]" corporeality which prevents it during less extraordinary times.<sup>2</sup> De Berdt Reed observes that a shared feeling, love for one's country, impels women to "forget[]" their supposedly inadequate bodies. Thus sentiment overwhelms physical impediments. Yet, when de Berdt Reed declares "we associate ourselves," she characterizes that predictable forgetfulness as purposeful. Though women are "[b]orn for liberty," women must consciously accept their nature and join an activist sisterhood.

To some, it might seem as if de Berdt Reed's image of women predictably choosing to be overwhelmed by a sentiment that they have been "born for" is more rhetorical flourish than profound thought. However, I would argue that the logical tension between the two phrases "born for liberty" and "we associate ourselves" is productive rather than contradictory. Together, they imply that women's susceptibility to

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<sup>2</sup> And even there de Berdt Reed's catalog of women's extraordinary and physical actions during times of war ironically calls into question their "weakness."

liberty's affective appeal may not be individually inherent, but may more accurately be understood as compelled by familial relationships. After all, though images of biology and innateness may more readily come to the minds of contemporary readers, "born for" also evokes impressions of birth, kinship, and ancestors. When de Berdt Reed declares, "[W]e associate ourselves," her words occur within the context of preexisting affiliations. Thus, this second phrase actually complements "born for liberty" because it casts the community engendered through her proposal as akin to a union of families, a sororal marriage among similarly feeling and motivated women. Here, the community-engendering process resembles a traditional practice by which one extends family and, despite the publicly activist and political nature of this community, de Berdt Reed implies that her coterie of American women is associating and interceding out of familial obligation.

Inspired by de Berdt Reed's subtle connection of public involvement to familial intimacy, this dissertation explores the role of certain intimate affiliations in eighteenth-century colonial American women's approaches to community. In doing so, my project recovers a history of black, white, and Native women writers actively at work in shaping alternative visions of community in early America. I contend that these early American women employ the language of personal intimacy -- familial, spiritual, domestic -- to craft wide-ranging public interventions. Through references to their private affiliations, they associate themselves with others who share their religious, economic, political, and social concerns and thereby forge semi-public communities. I demonstrate that because such language retains women's often un-egalitarian and un-affective experiences of

quotidian intimacy and therefore appears "natural" for women, it masks the radicalism, formal and substantive, of their interventions. Thus, in making public issues intimate, these women discreetly authorize and advance their interests.

The texts examined in this dissertation -- texts by Coosaponakeesa, Eliza Lucas Pinckney, Sarah Osborn, Milcah Martha Moore, and Phillis Wheatley -- are a deliberately diverse set and include a variety of genres, including published and manuscript poetry, diplomatic and legal documents, commonplace books, spiritual diaries, autobiographies, and letters. Yet all these women use the same techniques whether they are preaching religious principles, positing alternative political models, or promoting preferred agricultural commodities. From their writing, semi-public communities -- both textual and physical -- emerge that circulate these authors' opinions and advocate their interests in ways that appear conservative instead of radical, proper instead of indecent.

Early American intimacy has been the subject of a lively scholarly conversation of late, perhaps because the influential work of Jürgen Habermas and Benedict Anderson has encouraged scholars to think of the eighteenth-century public sphere as a space where anonymous intimacy emerged and initiated modernization.<sup>3</sup> From such a perspective, then, the establishment of American democracy is an ongoing project in which disparate individuals must come to and continue to imagine themselves as egalitarian intimates. Those on the nation's peripheries -- i.e. those marginalized on the basis of gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, etc. -- seemingly reside there because they are strangers to

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<sup>3</sup> I, too, am greatly indebted to the work of Habermas and Anderson. My title pays not very covert homage to the latter's *Imagined Communities*. See Benedict R. O'G. Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Editions / NLB, 1983) and Jürgen Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

the national state of intimacy, and one can trace in their writings an effort to proclaim an affective similarity to the citizenry or, conversely, establish an alternate community of feeling to make palatable or obviate their alienation.

As may be apparent from my brief review of scholarship about early American intimacy, it can be difficult to summarize without repeatedly featuring affect. In fact, within this scholarly conversation, sentiment has frequently become a stand-in for intimacy, even when critics are careful to note that the terms are not synonymous.<sup>4</sup> Because examinations of intimacy have largely served to explicate how democracy and its inclusions and exclusions develop and operate, affective forms of intimacy have received the bulk of critical analysis. Love for freedom, pity for and fear of the other, and mourning over revolutionary violence: these kinds of feeling are ideally suited to such examinations since, unlike intimacy founded upon kinship and other domestic attachments, they are more handily available, portable, and extendable.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, they are capable of uniting, at least for a moment, anonymous and disparate individuals into a citizenry.

More recent scholarship has emphasized the exclusionary and radical possibilities of early American intimacy. For example, in *Intimacy in America: Dreams of Affiliation in Antebellum Literature*, Peter Coviello considers race as an identification through which

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<sup>4</sup> For example, in *Intimacy in America: Dreams of Affiliation in Antebellum America* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), Peter Coviello is careful to provide a capacious and complex definition of intimacy (6). Yet, like others, he primarily concerns himself with affective forms of intimacy.

<sup>5</sup> See, for example, Julia A Stern's *The Plight of Feeling: Sympathy and Dissent in the Early American Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), Michelle Burnham's *Captivity and Sentiment: Cultural Exchange in American Literature, 1682-1861* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1997); and Elizabeth Barnes's *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

(white) individuals can establish their intimacy and solidify national unity. He asserts, "[R]ace, I argue, becomes its own affective language, a way to describe one's intimate connectedness to the distant and anonymous citizens of the republic" (7). His work depends upon a definition of intimacy that positions affect at its center and, furthermore, he implies a sequence of first shared feeling (or at least a perception of or desire for it), then affiliation: "'Intimacy,'" he writes, "may thus designate a kind of connectedness between persons whose proper vehicle is feeling but, in the antebellum republic at least, the exact nature of the feeling meant to carry that connection was, to a remarkable degree, undetermined" (*Intimacy in America: Dreams of Affiliation in Antebellum Literature* 6). Intimacy's suppleness makes it the perfect "vehicle" for instantiating and limiting national attachment.

In another vein, Ivy Schweitzer, in her recent *Perfecting Friendship: Politics and Affiliation in Early American Literature*, endeavors to recover the radical possibilities and uses of friendship within women's fiction by contrasting them with the largely conservative uses of it in many white men's texts. Precisely because friendship "typically implies parity, symmetry, spirituality, and self-affirmation through rational desire and free choice rather than hierarchy, physicality, and self-loss or self-dilution through irrational and uncontrollable passion or forced alliance" (9), women authors as well as other members of marginalized groups can use friendship to imaginatively bridge cultural, racial, economic, and political divides. Through it, they "consider and ameliorate" their "status" (6). Schweitzer's study is well-reasoned and fascinating, and she (convincingly) identifies friendship as a "trope of democratic possibility" (23).

Such discussions of race and gender alongside intimacy and democratization crucially complicate our understanding of intimacy by, on the one hand, indicating the oppression of non-intimates that can accompany intimacy and, on the other, affirming its transgressive and transformative potential.<sup>6</sup> But intimacy is not always egalitarian, and egalitarian intimacy is not necessarily the ideal. Moreover, intimacy is not always “proper[ly]” (to use Coviello’s word), primarily, or even partially affective. In the first place, most early American households and families were structured hierarchically in ways that nowadays seem both positive (parents should nurture and guide their children) and negative (husbands should not oppress their wives). Second, women and other marginalized persons had little access to early America’s egalitarian models, especially in public life. They could not vote or run for political office. Laws of coverture restricted women’s property rights. Those of African descent were subject to enslavement. Native tribes lost their land. Most mainstream churches did not have women preachers. Finally, people throughout early America were intimate with those they felt no affection for or for whom their affection was nonessential to their attachment. People married for many reasons other than love or even liking. Enslaved persons and slaveowners lived in close quarters, especially in the North. Neighbors and co-parishioners knew quite personal things about each other, and became deeply implicated in each others’ private lives, especially during times of crisis and celebration. In short, egalitarian affective intimacy is important, but it is only one element of early American intimacy.

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<sup>6</sup> The troubling of the frequent exclusivity that occurs alongside egalitarian attachment has also been admirably performed in a transatlantic context. For examples, see George Bouloukos’s *The Grateful Slave: The Emergence of Race in Eighteenth-Century British and American Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Laura Stevens’s *The Poor Indians: British Missionaries, Native Americans, and Colonial Sensibility* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

Since scholars of early America have so closely linked intimacy, democracy, and sentiment and rarely addressed moments of uneven and unaffectionate intimacy, our understanding of intimacy as a tool for public intervention and communal imagining, especially in the hands of marginalized persons and especially in the colonial era, is woefully incomplete. For example, in the case of de Berdt Reed's proposal, Coviello and Schweitzer would likely identify the radical and powerful potential of its "sentiments." They might note how de Berdt Reed's declarations of gratitude and concern towards the American soldiers announce women's affiliation to an often masculine patriotic public even as they privilege elite white women's mediation of it. They might place her petition at the beginning of their narratives of American intimacy and see her proposal as signaling a contest that will pervade Republican era and antebellum literature. Yet these scholars would also likely miss the occurrence and implication of what I believe is a profoundly indicative moment: Esther de Berdt Reed's citation of another Esther in her introductory genealogy. In this moment, de Berdt Reed's textual propinquity to her namesake, marked with a subsequent tongue-in-cheek exclamation point ("Esther!"),<sup>7</sup> directs us to her subtle suggestion about the connection between familial affiliations and feminine intervention into public life as well as her belief that she is a follower of tradition rather than an innovator. *The Sentiments of an American Woman* wittily proclaims that Esther de Berdt Reed is the biblical Esther's successor, an assertion rather

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<sup>7</sup> The singularity of this exclamation point -- it is the only one in the entire document -- further implies its rhetorical importance.



furthered by the Book of Esther's propensity towards thematic doublings, parallels, and repetitions.<sup>8</sup>

The first Esther became the Queen of Persia after entrancing its king. King Xerxes had been methodically sampling the land's virgins in search of a new queen. After a year in seclusion purifying and beautifying with the other candidates, Esther entered Xerxes's bedchamber armed only with her body and the suggestions of the harem's head eunuch, suggestions that remain mysteriously and tantalizingly unnamed. By morning, Xerxes had selected her as his Queen, not knowing that she was Jewish.<sup>9</sup>

Later, when a political aspirant convinces Xerxes to condemn all the Persian Jews to death, Esther's adopted father Mordecai urges her to use her influence with Xerxes to stop the genocide. She initially hesitates, loathe to reveal her religious identity, worried about angering her husband, and perhaps feeling that a failed intercession would confirm her diminished allure and his cooled affections. Yet Mordecai voices the inexorableness of her position when he charges that inaction would be a rejection of her fate. He scoffs at her caution: "Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (*King James Bible* Esther 4:13-14). Convinced, Esther

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<sup>8</sup> For example, two Queens of Persia appear in the Book of Esther, and Esther prepares two banquets for her husband and the political aspirant, Haman, before revealing her petition. The book also frequently has repeated phrases. For a discussion of parallelism in the Book of Esther, see Jon D. Levenson's *Esther* (London: SCM, 1997). Jo Carruther's *Esther Through the Centuries* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008) provides a fascinating overview of this "strange" book's diverse and contested reception history.

<sup>9</sup> It is not clear from the biblical text why Esther hid her identity or whether Xerxes would have cared.

leaves the harem and appears uninvited in front of Xerxes. After revealing her Jewish ancestry, she pleads for mercy. Linking her own fate to the planned slaughter, she powerfully asks, "For how can I endure to see the evil that shall come unto my people? or how can I endure to see the destruction of my kindred?" (*King James Bible* Esther 8:6). Xerxes makes a new decree and authorizes the Jews to destroy their enemies on the day originally designated for their annihilation. Thus, Esther, daughter and wife, saves the Persian Jews and executes their enemies.

The biblical Esther is a reluctant heroine. It is her adopted father who reminds her of her undeniable affiliations -- marital, filial, ancestral -- and who identifies the obligation she owes to her people because of her marriage. Thus, her familial relationships oblige her involvement with public life. Her intervention is particularly striking since she resides in a harem, a locale that one could describe as quintessentially feminine. And it is worth noting that these relationships are not cast as entirely matters of bloodlines. In fact, Esther's affiliations are often synthetic.

The second Esther, de Berdt Reed, may have been initially reluctant herself in terms of her support for the American Revolution. She was, after all, only a recent arrival to America. Emigrating from London in 1770 with her new American husband Joseph Reed, she was perhaps swept up by his sentiments before she became swept up by her own. Her initial letters home imply a certain dismay at the provincialism of American life and a longing for England. In a 1770 letter to her brother, she writes, "America, my dear Dennis, is a fine country, but to compare it to England in any respect, except the clear weather, is wrong, for it will not bear the most distant comparison" (Reed

160). Her correspondence over the next few years reflects her view that America is her husband's country, but not her own. Even in June of 1775, after Joseph's departure for Boston with George Washington, she continues to speak of American concerns detachedly: "the people here are determined to die or be free" (Reed 216). Yet two weeks later, once Joseph has been appointed secretary and aide-de-camp to General Washington and perhaps after receiving news of the Battle at Bunker Hill, she describes the Revolution as a "glorious contest" and proclaims her faith in victory (Reed 219). Finally, by September, she identifies herself as firmly American. She repeatedly refers to "our enemies" and celebrates her immigration to America since it enables her to "serv[e]" "our country" (Reed 228-29).

In subtly alluding to parallels between herself and the biblical Esther, de Berdt Reed underscores that pre-existing intimate attachments often structure and compel future ones. And rather than portraying such an imbrication as limiting, her proposal points to the empowerment that resides in accommodating and capitalizing upon women's experiences of personal intimacy, much of it uneven, when making forays into public life. Such an understanding of intimacy and its uses indicates that propinquity and affiliation often precede affect, a quite different understanding of intimacy than is found in work such as Coviello's and Schweitzer's. Thus, in this instance, proximity may be a better predictor of intimacy than shared feeling.

De Berdt Reed's characterization of shared affect as a byproduct of intimacy, not a precursor, supports my contention that we have underdescribed the complexity of early American intimacy. While my dissertation does not seek to rectify comprehensively this

gap in our knowledge, an undertaking which is too massive for a single project, I do intend to elucidate more fully some of the sources and uses of intimacy within women's writing. I am particularly interested in those moments where women authors perform interventions into public life through language that seems highly personal. By thinking locally and by being attentive to how women connect their quotidian experiences of intimacy to their broader visions of community, I hope to resist what I see as the slippage between intimacy, democracy, and affect.

In analyzing texts, I will focus upon what I call the "language of personal intimacy." This term refers a certain type of affiliatory discourse that was readily available to women. Colonial era women were mothers, daughters, wives, friends, and neighbors. They had a variety of connections to others -- male and female -- in their private lives through shared rituals, labor, domestic space, and familial bonds. Thus, it is a subset of intimacy that is grounded in physicality and proximity. Here, a synonym for intimacy could be closeness. Affect is a facet of such intimacy, and therefore appears frequently in this study, but its absence or marginality does not preclude or weaken such intimate attachments.

Focusing upon the language of personal intimacy in women's writing increases our knowledge of how women intervened in public life. After all, within the domestic sphere, women had access to a variety of forms of authority and privilege -- maternal, relational, moral, spiritual, educational, ritualistic -- that, if expanded or transplanted, could potentially authorize and privilege women's views and commentaries. This is not to say that American women generally challenged or resisted the climate of freedom and

equality that gradually arose in the early- to mid- eighteenth century and that swelled in its final decades. Indeed, I seek to recover how some women could and did intervene in public affairs in ways that often reflected a concern less with challenging, supplementing, or altering the broad transformation of society than with influencing the here and now.

As this final thought implies, there is something decidedly local in the women's interventions that this dissertation traces. In fact, these interventions take shape in the form of what I term semi-public communities. For the purposes of my argument, a semi-public community is one that is structured upon private relationships but that extends those relationships to a localized group of others who share public concerns. Members are connected through bonds that *sound* familial, affective, and domestic. In this scenario, as in the case of de Berdt Reed's proposal, proximity often predates intimacy. Such a communal configuration permits the women studied here to intervene into public life in a way that is, on the surface, discreet and in line with their subordinate status. When they establish that they are members of a semi-public community, describing proximal relationships with the language of personal intimacy, they domesticate their interest in public life. When they subsequently circulate their concerns, that circulation, both in content and format, appears conservative instead of radical, proper instead of indecent. When they enfold others into semi-public communities, they also create structures of obligation that serve their concerns and their visions of community. Thus, the language of personal intimacy serves as a cloak for these women's public interventions.

I am careful to use "semi-public" as a descriptor and to retain "community" as the

noun. I do so in order to differentiate semi-public communities from public spheres. Public sphere theory, though immensely influential to our current understandings of eighteenth-century writing (especially print) and history (especially political), has often been criticized as problematic by feminist scholars. One issue they point to is the subordinate status of women within the foundational Habermasian model: women are ideologically restricted to the private sphere and therefore seem pre-political. Another issue they underscore is how certain analyses privilege masculine over feminine forms of discourse since they view publications, not manuscripts, as central to public sphere operations.<sup>10</sup> To address these concerns, some scholars have segmented the public sphere in order to allow for more competing and complex descriptions of how and when women participated in it. For example, Elizabeth Maddock Dillon has precisely located women's central role within the literary public sphere (as opposed to the political public sphere) and explains its dependency upon women as both authors and subjects.<sup>11</sup> Still others have identified public sphere offspring in order to account for how marginalized persons, including women, could participate in the public sphere. The two that are most clearly applicable to women's experience are the counterpublic, which defines itself in opposition to the public, and the intimate public, which defines itself in terms of a belief in shared feeling and experience, because they permit women to oppose or circumvent

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<sup>10</sup> For feminist critiques, see Joan Landes's *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988); Nancy Fraser's "What's Critical About Critical Theory?: The Case of Habermas and Gender" in *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1989); and Mary P. Ryan's *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> See Elizabeth Maddock Dillon's *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere* (Stanford University Press, 2004), especially chapter 1: "Gender, Liberal Theory, and the Literary Public Sphere."

their exclusion and oppression even as they remain theoretical outsiders.<sup>12</sup> Clearly, public sphere scholarship is continually evolving and increasingly relevant to interpretations of women's writing. Yet it cannot account for the phenomena I trace in this dissertation.

It cannot because semi-public communities are not publics. One of the major differences between them is that, unlike publics, semi-public communities have what appear to be verifiable and traceable relationships between their members. Michael Warner asserts that publics "come[] into being through an address to indefinite strangers" (Warner 120). In direct contrast to publics, semi-public communities are not essentially anonymous. I should clarify that I do not mean members of these semi-public communities always know and can name each other. It is the *possibility* of doing so or, in some cases, the sense of possibility (even if it is not true) that is important. This is certainly the case for the women who participated in de Berdt Reed's scheme: women with more meager funds pooled their money to make the minimum subscription, women individually and collectively sent contributions directly to regional administrators who were often women married to politicians and other prominent personages, and those administrators kept track of donations through lists. Thus, even if not all the women knew each other, there was a sense of personal knowledge infusing their efforts.

By noting this distinction between publics and semi-public communities, I hope to communicate that women's historical exclusion from the public sphere has not been

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<sup>12</sup> For detailed descriptions of counterpublic and intimate public, see Michael Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics* 117-24 and the introduction to Lauren Berlant's *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality in American Literature* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

entirely negative or unfortunate. Maybe early American women's entrance into the public sphere would have entailed a certain dilution of influence and power that alternative versions of community preserved and extended. For the most part, the women discussed in this dissertation inflect their visions of public life with personal intimacy. They cast public life as more virtuous, more prosperous, and more satisfying when its interpersonal interactions resemble the quotidian intimacies of their private lives and retain the specificity of their experiences.

Because I analyze pre-national literature, my dissertation acts as a prequel and a counterpoint to public sphere scholarship. It suggests that the tiers, hierarchies, and inner sanctums found in women's depictions of community are central and long-standing tenets of public life. Therefore, my project has certain broader implications for our approach to American affiliation. In stressing the ideally egalitarian nature of intimacy and its philosophical roots, other scholars have implied that women are the appropriators, not the suppliers, of models for personal attachment in the public sphere.<sup>13</sup> In other instances, such as the groundbreaking *Prodigals and Pilgrims* in which Jay Fliegelman deftly draws attention to the shift in the eighteenth-century from an "older patriarchal family authority" to "a new parental ideal characterized by a more affectionate and equalitarian relationship with children" (1), the differences between men's and women's experiences of personal intimacy have not been addressed. Consequently, some forms of attachment, such as the maternal, have been subsumed under more "universal" (and usually masculine) models, such as fraternity and patriarchy. In addition to the many

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<sup>13</sup> For example, see Ellison and Schweitzer.



contributions of such studies, they have had the unfortunate effect of suggesting that early American women are perpetually secondary players in the realm of public restructuring. This dissertation presents a much more iterative picture in which women originate in addition to receive models of affiliation. It suggests that women provide affiliatory models to the American public, from how to trade and govern to how to pray and mourn.

### *Methodology and Chapter Summary*

My methodology relies heavily upon close readings and deep contextualization. In each chapter, I consider questions of genre conventions, regional history, religious specificity, material culture, and author biography. In relying so heavily upon a broad array of contextual sources, my readings are quite interdisciplinary and connect to anthropology, religion, performance studies, and philosophy as well as political, economic, and scientific history. Though I am indebted to various theoretical schools, including cultural studies, feminist theory, and new historicism, the theory that suffuses *Imagined Intimacies* is one that emerges from the texts themselves. By working closely and even intimately with the texts, I have sought to let the authors' words guide my own language and analysis. In this way, I am deeply indebted to my training in Native studies scholarship, a field in which the theory arises from the communities in which texts are written. Moreover, it is a model that insists upon community as process. As Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) explains in his definition of Native kinship, “[It] isn’t a static thing; it’s dynamic, ever in motion. It requires attentiveness; kinship is best thought of as a verb rather than a noun, because kinship, in most indigenous contexts, is something

that's done more than something that simply *is*" (150). In porting the Native studies methodology to early American women's writing, I too seek to discuss community as something active and on-going, an approach that I frame in the first chapter through my analysis of the Creek woman Coosaponakeesa's writings and uses of intimacy.

Chapter 1, "Addressing Commerce and Community," considers the legal and business letters of two women -- the Creek Coosaponakeesa and the white South Carolinian Eliza Lucas Pinckney -- to establish the suppleness, availability, and localization of the language of personal intimacy. My goal in making these women's writings the subject of the first chapter is to begin at something of a different point. First, they reside in the southeastern region of North America. Second, they write during the 1730s, 1740s, and 1750s. Third, in the case of Coosaponakeesa, the author is not even Anglo-American. Thus, they are on the geographic, temporal, and cultural fringes of the traditional narrative about eighteenth-century colonial American public life, a narrative that often revolves around questions of Revolution and democratization (not local trade and diplomacy), begins later in the century, and focuses on Anglo-American perspectives and the New England and the mid-Atlantic regions.

The first half of the chapter is dedicated to the legal and diplomatic writings of Coosaponakeesa, a mixed-blood Creek woman and trader who interpreted meetings between the first Georgian colonists and local indigenous populations. Her extant texts -- treaties, interpreter's reports, letters, memorials<sup>14</sup> -- were preserved along with other bureaucratic remnants of the British colonization of Georgia. She was initially a friend of

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<sup>14</sup> A memorial in this case is "a statement of facts forming the basis of or expressed in the form of a petition or remonstrance to a person in authority, a government, etc." See *OED* "memorial" def. 5b.

the colonists and later, when Georgia's administrators refused to recognize her land claims or adequately (in her eyes) recompense her for her service and financial expenses on behalf of the colony, she entered into more of an antagonistic relationship, one that is played out in a series of memorials in which she explains her position and enumerates Georgia's debt. My analysis recovers how Coosaponakeesa rhetorically structures the Creek-Georgian trade relationship, conceptualizing it as a kind of friendship predicated upon Creek kinship, and then later uses that friendship's relative tenuousness to challenge and condemn Georgian behavior in regards to her restitution claims.

Eliza Lucas Pinckney, in contrast, downplays the power of familial relationships and instead privileges presence upon and knowledge of an agricultural landscape. While in charge of her family's three South Carolina plantations during her father's absence, she composes business letters to him, including ones about her increasingly successful experiments with indigo. Her letters subtly establish her greater authority by characterizing her as a member of a local plantationite community, united in its shared mastery of the land and climate. Local economic interests and the ability to advance them are the requirements for communal membership, a set that limits this semi-public community in terms of race, class, and location and even, perhaps, capacity for curiosity, but does not do so along gender lines.

Both women understand proximity to initiate affiliation that only then entails communal responsibilities and expectations. Both women are also highly cognizant that such affiliation is tiered and flexible. In a more egalitarian conception of communal intimacy, these women would be unable to so readily claim authority, as Coosaponakeesa

does when she reminds Georgian leaders that her unassailable kinship to the Creeks grants her the ability to transform friends into enemies and as Lucas Pinckney does when she subtly reprimands her father for not properly provisioning her experiments. Moments of self-interest and public critique appear natural and necessitated by their memberships in semi-public communities.

Whereas the first chapter presents the language of personal intimacy as under the control of Coosaponakeesa and Lucas Pinckney, Chapter 2, "Nursing Piety in Newport," narrates the idiom's unruliness. In it, I tell the story of Sarah Osborn through the lens of a ten-day long spiritual crisis caused by the resistance of Phillis, an enslaved black woman, to the sale of Bobey, Phillis's teenage son and Osborn's slave. My claims about the origins and resolution of the spiritual crisis connect to a nascent semi-public community based in Osborn's home and pre-existing the crisis. This semi-public community, an outgrowth of Osborn's particularly literal interpretation of her spiritual life as a divine marriage and a manifestation of her resultant calling to nurture those of God's children who are close at hand, in turn metamorphosizes. A spiritual revival, led by Osborn and incorporating a multi-class, multi-racial, and multi-denominational population, sweeps Newport in subsequent years and eventually results in Newport's emergence as a vanguard of New England abolitionism. Thus Phillis's and Osborn's story is a catalytic locus within a narrative about the capaciousness and transformativeness of the language of personal intimacy.

In many ways, the third chapter, "Phillis Wheatley and Forgetting to Mourn," presents a more complicated picture because the members of the semi-public community

at its center are dead. Focusing primarily on Wheatley's funeral elegies, especially those written about children, I contend that they declare her alignment with her dead subjects, a group that she characterizes as spiritually knowledgeable and released from grief. In contrast, her addressees -- parents, siblings, spouses, and children of the deceased -- remain inescapably imprisoned by their bereavement. She thus crafts an authorial persona that resides in a state of intimate authority over her white audience and that proclaims a measure of transcendence over the material experience of her enslavement. This modeling of personal consolation and authority within poetry intended to console others then acts as an invitation to her enslaved black audience to similarly disalign themselves from grief and align themselves with this epistemic community of the dead.<sup>15</sup>

Chapter 4, "A 'Union of the Soul'," examines textual juxtaposition in Milcah Martha Moore's Revolutionary Era commonplace book to expose her tiered and exacting approach to friendship, a definition that then corresponds to a critique of the war and a vision for ideal politics. A former Friend, exiled due to her consanguineous marriage yet still faithful to the sect's tenets, Moore arranges selections in her commonplace book in order to argue for and model pious friendship as the ideal. Transcribing poetry written by female acquaintances and family, she textually produces an intimate community of pious friends. This core community then initiates a series of political critiques that focuses primarily upon what she sees as the *unfriendliness* of revolutionaries.

Each story in my dissertation is distinctive and requires extensive

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<sup>15</sup> Because Wheatley published her elegies, this invitation to her fellow enslaved blacks circulates beyond those that she may have come in contact with through her friends and acquaintances in Boston. Therefore, it also resembles a counterpublic. See Warner's *Publics and Counterpublics* 117-24.

contextualization and careful readings, yet collectively they present a picture that is multi-denominational, multi-racial, multi-class, and multi-regional. As a result, my project separates the discussion of intimacy from the discussion of nationalism and is therefore able to articulate a lushly pragmatic schema via which women could and did intervene in colonial American public life.

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In this introduction, one of my intentions has been to instill confidence and curiosity in my reader. Yet I do not believe that such an introduction would have been possible at the beginning of my work with these authors. To put it mildly, this project has often been one of uncertainty and discovery. I initially wanted to produce something that would more definitively emerge from public sphere scholarship and recuperate women as major players in the colonial American public sphere. Yet these women authors repeatedly refused to drift into anonymity, even the potentially productive and empowering anonymity of publics. Indeed, their texts and visions of community reflect their individuality. They are not portable or extendable, and could even be described as retaining their authors' personality quirks.

This aspect of my project became palpable one sunny summer day at the Beinecke Library. I had journeyed to the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts, on a research grant from the Center for Women and Gender Studies at the University of Texas. I finished my work one day ahead of schedule and thought I would drive down to New Haven to read the several Sarah Osborn spiritual diaries that were

housed at Yale University. As I came across the entry in Osborn's diary that acts as the pivotal event in Chapter 2: "Nursing Piety in Newport," I found it difficult to continue. As Osborn relayed her anger with Phillis, an enslaved black woman, and justified her plan to sell Phillis's son Bobey, I started to shake. I was disgusted with Osborn and could not imagine writing a page, much less a chapter, about this odious, unfeeling woman, a reaction that, even as I had it, surprised me since I had had little difficulty dealing with Eliza Lucas Pinckney's status as a slaveholder on several South Carolinian plantations. I almost stopped my transcription and walked out of the library.

Without ruining the story I tell in Chapter 2, let me say that I am glad I did not abandon my research. That entry and its successors utterly transformed my understanding of Osborn's many other writings, the evangelical revivals she led in Newport during the 1760s, and her work with persons of African descent. After reading those entries, I began to see something quintessentially Osbornian in the semi-public spiritual communities she established. Her understandings of family were part and parcel of how she enacted community.

For me, that moment in the archives was one of sudden intimacy catalyzed by fragile pages written over two hundred years before. Osborn's words had an immediacy and humanity that were unavoidable, even if they were not enjoyable or admirable. Thus, even as I hope my reader is confident and curious about the pages to come, I also hope that my reader will experience similar moments of intimacy with the women and the writings that I have gathered together. Let us associate ourselves.

## CHAPTER ONE

### Addressing Commerce and Community:

#### Coosaponakeesa's and Eliza Lucas Pinckney's Epistolary Interventions into Mercantilism

In a seventeenth-century letter, James Howell (1594?-1666) writes, "It was a quaint Difference the Ancients did put 'twixt a *Letter* and an *Oration*; that the one should be attired like a Woman, the other like a Man: the latter of the two [Oration] is allowed large side Robes, as long Periods, Parentheses, Similes, Examples, and other Parts of Rhetorical Flourishes: But a *Letter* or *Epistle* should be short-coated, and closely couched" (Howell 17). In this discussion of forms of conversation, Howell's letter aligns orality with floridity and women, and epistolarity with plainness and men. He further distinguishes between speech's feminine unreliability which emerges from "a moist slippery Place" and the pen's masculine permanency which "leaves things behind it upon firm and authentic record" (Howell 17-8).<sup>1</sup> In using the language of dress and gender, these quotations highlight the performative potential of epistolary writing for literate women. By opting for the phallic pen as opposed to the slippery tongue, early modern

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<sup>1</sup> The anonymous author of the frequently reprinted *The Complete Letter-Writer: or Polite English Secretary* (5<sup>th</sup> ed. London: Henry Woodgate, 1758) refers to this letter in his or her introduction (45-6). Interestingly, this author removes reference to the moistness of the tongue.



women potentially de-eroticized themselves as the moist receptacle for masculine desire and gained the authority and permanency of the authentic record. At the same time, these women likely brought a sense of fecundity and intimacy to the written letter.

In this chapter, I will explore two examples of women's epistolary writings: the Creek Coosaponakeesa's diplomatic and legal texts and the elite white South Carolinian Eliza Lucas Pinckney's business letters. I argue that these two quite different women both inflect public economic issues with a productive intimacy. Indeed, their writings propose that vibrant trading networks and agricultural regions should be bound together as intimate communities. They describe and define relationships between economic partners with intimate language and then circulate their letters, just as they circulate goods, thus advancing their communal visions. Because such visions elevate their understandings of inter-personal relationships, these same visions also advance their personal economic interests.

I chose these two women not only because I find their under-examined writings fascinating, but also because they permit me to begin my analysis of colonial American literature and history from a different point; both authors wrote in the southeast, and one is a woman of color. Therefore, their texts are geographically, racially, and politically distant from many early American studies. Moreover, economics, especially as it concerns empire, is rarely understood as intimate. With this chapter, I hope to foreground the interpersonal relationships that are the basis for trade. In doing so, I would like to suggest that early American women's use of intimate language to intervene in such public spaces as economics (and in future chapters religion and politics)

capitalizes upon a preexisting aspect of public life just as it utilizes a preexisting rhetoric of personal intimacy.

Coosaponakeesa,<sup>2</sup> also known successively as Mary Musgrove, Mary Matthews, and Mary Bosomworth, was a self-identified Creek woman of mixed Creek-English ancestry. She was an Indian trader in colonial Georgia and ran frontier trading posts alongside her husbands during her three marriages. She also acted as an interpreter, diplomat, and advisor to various English Governors and their representatives in colonial Georgia. In her range of capacities, she crafted a multitude of documents, including treaties, administrative letters, memorials,<sup>3</sup> and interpreters' reports. In Georgia history, she is best known as a diplomatic aide to James Oglethorpe, the first leader of Georgia, and as a controversial figure who aggressively pursued land claims against the colony for twenty years and involved her Creek allies in the disputes.

Eliza Lucas Pinckney was an elite white woman who lived in both England and Antigua before arriving in colonial South Carolina at the age of fifteen. When her father returned to Antigua soon after, she ran her family's three plantations and began experimenting with various tropical seeds to determine if one variety could be turned into a lucrative commodity. In letters, many of which she transcribed or summarized in her letterbook, she apprised her father of the plantations and the progress of her experiments. Her successes with indigo established that plant as a profitable crop, and she remains an important figure in historiographic discussions of colonial South Carolina agriculture and

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<sup>2</sup> I have used this spelling, mirroring her own spelling of her name in her 1754 Memorial (see Candler, Vol. 26, 465).

<sup>3</sup> A memorial is an expression of facts in support of a petition. Hers are written in the third person.

economy.

The extant writings of these two women give us a glimpse into the complex potential of women's epistolary discourse. While I value the knowledge they can provide and view the two women as strong and worthy of recognition for their unapologetic contributions to their economies and communities, I acknowledge that they were not always admirable. Coosaponakeesa undermined other Indian nations' economies in order to promote her own, sold alcohol to her fellow Creeks, enlisted Creek military support against other tribes who fought on the side of Britain's imperial rivals, and generally advanced British colonization in Georgia and South Carolina. Above and beyond owning and managing slaves, Lucas Pinckney introduced, through indigo cultivation, a laborious and brutal agricultural system that more deeply instantiated her region's dependence upon slave labor. Though I do not wish to condone or ignore these effects, listing and judging them will not be the focus of this chapter. Instead, I wish to determine how they used their understandings of personal intimacy to further what they saw as their communities' economic interests even when those interests advanced at the cost of others.

In order to do so, one must understand the mercantilist system within which the women wrote. Mercantilism is an economic model in which the colonies are in balance with the home country, England. The colonies provide England with raw materials, including sugar, rice, tobacco, hemp, tar, dye-stuffs, fur, and lumber. In return, England provides manufactured goods, such as cloth and guns. Both sides have a stable market, and England even offers bounties, or monetary incentives, for the production of desired agricultural commodities. However, England must be a physical point of contact for all

trade to and from a particular colony. Restricted raw materials can only be shipped to England on British vessels, even if the material is Virginian tobacco intended for France. Manufactured goods must pass through England on their way to the colonies and shipped on British vessels, even if the goods are Portuguese wines intended for South Carolina. In addition to legislating a stable market, this principle allows England to get extra tariff revenue and maintain a tight control on raw materials, the foundation of its manufacturing sector.<sup>4</sup> Instead of seeing indigenous peoples as targets for military overthrow, this system treats Indians as economic partners and encourages them to shift away from what are frequently subsistence hunting and farming economies towards trade economies that present raw materials in return for British manufactured goods. Though the "mercantile" system was not named until Adam Smith published *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* in 1776, economic historians use his term to describe Britain's balance of trade philosophy towards its colonies. This economic policy institutionally emerged through the various Navigation Acts of the 1650s and 1660s, underwent frequent revisions, and was repealed in 1849.

The ideals of mercantilism gave Anglo-American colonists a stable, rational system upon which to rely and in which to prosper. However, to truly have power within this system, a colony needed to provide a valuable commodity to the system. For elite

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<sup>4</sup> For a contemporaneous discussion of mercantilism during the time period under consideration, see William Wood's *A Survey of Trade* (London: Wilkins, 1718) though he never uses the term mercantilism. For the earliest use of the term, see Adam Smith's *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1976), especially the chapter entitled "Of the Principle of the Commercial or Mercantile System." For a modernist treatment which considers the system throughout the colonial era, see Eli F. Heckscher's *Mercantilism* (London: Macmillan, 1955). Much of my analysis comes from Michael Kammen's *Empire and Interest: The American Colonies and the Politics of Mercantilism* (Philadelphia and New York: J. B. Lippincott, 1970). For an analysis of mercantilism in Early Republican America, see John E. Crowley's *The Privileges of Independence: Neomercantilism and the American Revolution* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1993).

North American colonists, provincial experiment and the study of local flora and fauna were not only enlightened hobbies, but also acts which could identify or improve valuable commodities.

White Anglo-Americans were not the only members of the mercantilist economy of British North America. Enslaved black and Indian persons were brutally forced to participate in the colonial economy. Plantations depended upon slave labor, and the types of products produced and the landscapes in which they were produced changed enslaved persons' daily lives. Many free blacks willingly acted as planters themselves, owning and trading slaves, or supported local economies as artisans and trades people. For certain commodities, such as deerskins and furs, Indians traded with Anglo-Americans, and their economies adapted to the opportunities and demands of an expanding commercial network. Because peoples of color are so actively involved with the economy, their writings do not simply reflect the mercantilist perspective of the British Empire, but revise its terms in order to improve their relative position within that economy.

The mercantile landscape was quite volatile, and the literature written within it reflects that volatility. In *Oracles of Empire*, David S. Shields connects the lush images and ideas of such literature with mercantilism's vision of fecundity and profit. He points out that mercantilist philosophy assumes that each colony harbors "a surplus of some commodity that could be exchanged" and therefore "poets imagined the global economy in terms of profusion" (*Oracles of Empire: Poetry, Politics, and Commerce in British America, 1690-1750* 16). In literary imaginings, the colonies are "transmutable regions of

exchange value" wherein "native resources" transform into "whichever of the world's consumer items suited the demand of the empire" (D. S. Shields *Oracles of Empire: Poetry, Politics, and Commerce in British America, 1690-1750* 17).

However, the great preponderance of primary texts analyzed by Shields are by white men. He lists few female, African, or Afro-British voices and no Native voices in his "Bibliography of Primary Sources" (*Oracles of Empire: Poetry, Politics, and Commerce in British America, 1690-1750* 259-81). These others were substantially invested participants experiencing and influencing the cultural shifts emerging from the confluence of multiple cultures, ethnicities, races, genders, and languages in the eighteenth-century world of North America. Therefore, these under-examined authors could reveal more nuance in the mechanisms through which empire spread, peoples of color responded, and individual women and men participated.

### *Women Writing Mercantilist Letters*

As already noted, one of my assumptions in this chapter is that letters are a medium through which colonial era women in North America could stretch their normative cultural roles.<sup>5</sup> I select letters about political or commercial topics because their transgressive potential is particularly palpable. After all, in the British colonial culture, their subjects are ideologically masculine ones, and by writing such letters,

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<sup>5</sup> Another one of my assumptions is that letters are worthy of literary analysis. I disagree with many scholars' explicit and implicit judgments about the relative aesthetic worth of different kinds of writing. The privileging of certain genres, especially poetic, dramatic, and fictional ones, has produced a wealth of scholarly work that ignores the majority of writing occurring in America. Letters are absent from most critical discussions, except when they produce contextual or biographical information. Yet letters are found in a variety of forms and are material and personal interactions with culture. Some establish intimacy, some impel action, and some are fraught with powerful and elegant uses of language.

women engage with an epistolary subgenre that emerges from masculine authority.

However, this assumption remains absent from most critical discussions of the epistolary genre, which instead analyze the more traditional aesthetics found in social letters, especially those written by canonical novelists, poets, and playwrights.<sup>6</sup>

Analyzing more than social letters, Eve Tavor Bannet considers the diversity and specificity of epistolary genres. In *Empire of Letters: Letter Manuals and Transatlantic Correspondence, 1688-1820*, much of Bannet's examination centers upon letter manuals and their importance in creating imperial and regional identities.<sup>7</sup> She uncovers the practical importance of correspondence generally when she makes the significant observation that letter manuals disseminate "a single standard language, method and culture of polite communication" (x). She also peruses letter manuals to unearth the functional epistolary categories utilized by writers practiced in the art of epistolary

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<sup>6</sup> Bruce Redford's *The Converse of the Pen: Acts of Intimacy in the Eighteenth-Century Familiar Letter* remains a theoretical source for most critical discussions of English-language letters as literary texts. Spotlighting British authors, Redford argues for the aesthetic value of some authors' letters and produces six case studies of "masters" in the genre. Denying Barbara Herrnstein Smith's dismissal of letters as a "natural" as opposed to "fictive" discourse, Redford claims a "letter-writer's power to create a context as well as reflect it" and to permit letters to "escape from their origins as reservoirs of facts" (8-9). His argument demands that we reconsider the literary merit of letters and reminds us of the textual power of their contents. But his unerring focus upon familiar letters written for social purposes performs another oversight by not explicitly demanding a scholarly reconsideration of official, legal, or business letters as well. While Redford's work helped inspire additional work on social letters, few scholars have chosen to perform literary analyses of these other epistolary genres. Redford cites Barbara Herrnstein Smith's *On the Margins of Discourse* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1978), 15.

Elizabeth Hewitt has looked at more than social letters. In *Correspondence and American Literature, 1770-1865*, she connects letters to American nationalism. She argues that letters' ability to socially mediate made them crucial tools in the process of nation formation during the first fifty years of the American republic: "[f]ederal union is literally crafted out of correspondence" (2-3). Her emphasis upon the letters' position "between tongue and pen" underscores that letters are not simply a version of another genre, be it speech or pamphlet (Hewitt 10). Instead, even anonymous or impersonal letters demand a consideration of address and signature. While her argument clearly supports an analysis of letters' transformative potential, she does not sufficiently address the intimacy of non-social letters nor, in her focus upon post-colonial United States, does she turn her critical gaze at non-national communities.

<sup>7</sup> Letter manuals are the popular handbooks of the long eighteenth century which provided instruction in letter writing and examples of various letter types and epistolary situations.

writing. In an exhaustive list which reveals the precision and forethought with which authors crafted their letters, Bannet includes twenty-one familiar letter classes, including letters of business, letters of advice, letters of complaint, and letters of compliment (55-6). In her discussion of these classes, Bannet reminds her reader that scrutiny of their requirements deepens our epistolary analyses. For example, letters of condolence require pietistic comments. Their presence speaks less to the author's religion and more to the author's education and class. Similarly, the skill and techniques that an author displays in striving for a tone of sincerity in the midst of a prescribed form can reveal more about the author's earnestness (or lack thereof) than the content of actual statements about thoughts and feelings.

In response to Bannet's call for attentiveness to epistolary subgenre and in order to maintain an awareness of my assumption about the more palpable masculine authority present in certain subgenres, I will refer to the letters reviewed in my discussion as "mercantilist letters." I have selected this term because it contains reference to the particular confluence of economics and government that grounds the region's economies. Mercantilism is both a political and a commercial philosophy, and mercantilist letters are ones which intervene and comment upon either arena. These texts span the classes taxonomized in eighteenth-century letter manuals, but contain references to diplomacy, land acquisition, colonial trade, and agriculture. The majority of letters and other epistolary texts, such as letterbooks, will be commercial or political in nature, but Bannet's careful examination of transatlantic correspondence underscores that social letters may perform empire's work and vice versa.



Coosaponakeesa's and Eliza Lucas Pinckney's mercantilist letters in particular demonstrate how women responded to opportunities for personal expression within the mercantile worldview of British North America. While the types of communities which they negotiated through their letters and their expressions of intimacy vary, mercantilist letters were a crucial cultural tool for both of them. At the same time, their differing degree of cultural vulnerability -- Coosaponakeesa's community had already seen a decrease in population due to disease and military conflict -- forces us to read closely so as not to miss the specificity of their situations.

- **In a Red Petticoat: Friendship, Commerce, and Anger in Coosaponakeesa's Writings**

In 1733, the Creek trader Coosaponakeesa donned a red stroud petticoat and stationed herself on a bluff overlooking the Savannah River. Along with her husband, a group of local Yamacraw Indians, and the Yamacraw leader Tomochichi, she awaited the appearance of the first Georgian colonists and their governor, James Oglethorpe. At last seeing the colonists, the Yamacraws "saluted them with a volley of gunfire" (Fisher 55). The Georgians returned the greeting, and the two groups approached each other. Then, as the Yamacraws watched, Coosaponakeesa mediated and interpreted the first of many friendly diplomatic conversations between Tomochichi and Oglethorpe.

From the perspective of Oglethorpe and the other colonists, Coosaponakeesa "then appeared to be in mean and low Circumstances, being only Cloathed with a Red

Stroud Petticoat and Osnabrig Shift" (Candler *Proceedings of the President* 272).<sup>8</sup> As this description suggests, to them her selection of clothing for the first encounter accentuated that she was a woman, but an Indian one. On the one hand, as garments typically worn by English women, the petticoat and shift were familiar and declared femininity. On the other hand, as a petticoat and a shift were frequently undergarments and as she was bareheaded, she appeared strange and perhaps improper.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, her outfit may have evoked for them the economic motivations behind their colony, an extension of Britain's mercantile empire. Stroud, a woolen rag cloth usually used to make blankets for trade with Indians, would have demonstrated that she was willing to participate in trade for English manufactures and to adapt those objects for her own purposes through sewing or other material interventions.<sup>10</sup> In the above account, the anonymous white author, writing sixteen years after the meeting and describing her appearance as indicating "mean and low Circumstances," attests to the vividness of the moment even as he couches her difference in terms of poverty and inferiority. After

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<sup>8</sup> This meeting was staged by Coosaponakeesa. According to a letter she wrote to the South Carolina Council, she had been recommended to Oglethorpe by then South Carolina Governor Robert Johnson "as a proper Person to be Employed in all negotiations w<sup>th</sup> [the Creek] Nation" (Mary Bosomworth, Letter to Governor Glen, 1 June 1752, *South Carolina Council Journal*, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, 261). She knew when Oglethorpe was to arrive and stationed herself where they were sure to meet upon his arrival.

<sup>9</sup> According to the *OED*, a petticoat could be a skirt worn externally or underneath another skirt or dress. It could also be a short, tight-fitting undercoat worn by men or women for warmth, though this definition was increasingly rare by this point in time. A shift was a term meaning a woman's "body-garment" or "underclothing" by the eighteenth-century. While traditional winter dress for Creek women was a short deerskin skirt and a fur or cloth coat, Yamacraw women dressed similarly to Coosaponakeesa. The widespread replacement of deerskin with cloth potentially arose from the fact that cloth is easier to work. More striking is that Coosaponakeesa's right breast does not appear to have been exposed as Creek women's dress typically does. This may have been her concession to white sensibilities or the author may have chosen to not repeat this perhaps titillating detail in the bureaucratic record.

<sup>10</sup> Osnabrig is also a cloth acquired by trade. This coarse, durable cloth is made from linen and is used for clothing, tents, sacks, etc. American slaves were often given osnabrig clothing. See "osnabrig" and "stroud" in the *OED*.

encountering a woman attired in the objects of European trade, fluent in English and Creek, and experienced as an Indian trader, the colonists may have seen Coosaponakeesa as embodying their hopes for the new colony, a figure of raw potential awaiting the adornment of prosperity. After all, they depended upon her skills and her opinion throughout their early years in Georgia, even when they found her motives suspect.

Yet this image of Coosaponakeesa in her spare, unusual clothing spoke of more than Georgia's promise. To herself and to the Yamacraws observing this encounter, her choice of the color red likely announced a particular stance toward this first diplomatic meeting.<sup>11</sup> As a culture whose cosmology centered upon dualities and balance, the Creek nation -- and by extension the Yamacraw band, composed mainly of Creek exiles -- structured political relationships around the red and white (roughly translated as war and peace) duality.<sup>12</sup> The *talwa*, or main Creek political unit, and individual male Creek leaders had permanent identifications as red or white.<sup>13</sup> During local and national councils, those who were red argued from a red stance and those who were white argued

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<sup>11</sup> In an email, the anthropologist George E. Lankford agrees with my reading about the significant of the red petticoat and writes, "My own response to the situation with Oglethorpe is that I would immediately assume her red petticoat was not coincidental, and it may have been one of those resistance symbols that was to be understood by the N[ative] A[merican]'s and not by the Europeans" (George Lankford, "Re: Red and White," e-mail to the author, 8 Mar. 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Since Creek culture continues to thrive and adapt, my discussion about specifics is written in the past tense. However, dualities remain core components to Creek ideology. For a more in depth discussion of Creek duality, especially red and white symbolism, see Lankford.

<sup>13</sup> A *talwa* is roughly translatable as town. *Mico* is the Creek term for a *talwa*'s leader associated with peace. A *talwa* had a separate leader for war concerns, called the *tastanagi thlako* (war chief). The *mico* had more power than the war leaders and acted as the primary leader for the *talwa* (Lankford 57-8). Many Anglo-Americans seem to have been unaware of the distinction. Creeks organized in a confederacy in which each *talwa* had ostensibly equal membership, though some *talwas* were more powerful than others. Each Creek *talwa* could separately negotiate and approve treaties, another fact which the Georgian government did not fully grasp. Since Creek communities connected and traded via waterways, the Creek confederacy includes Upper Creek *talwas*, located on branches of Alabama, Coosa, and Tallapoosa Rivers, and Lower Creek *talwas*, located on branches of the Chattahoochee and Apalachicola Rivers. Lower Creek *talwas* were much closer geographically to Savannah and the Georgian government and therefore were most frequently in contact with Georgia's colonists.

from a white stance. Additionally, a man could identify himself as on the red or white path in terms of a relationship with another person or group.<sup>14</sup> Unlike men, women may have belonged to a red or white *talwa*, but otherwise they maintained balance in the cosmos "behind the scenes" (Hudson 187). Red and white alignments structured political engagements, but, according to Katherine E. Holland Braund, women's "considerable impact" on political matters derived from their privately influencing public opinion through "tears, ridicule, and other methods to persuade husbands, brothers, uncles and sons. This was especially true of matters of war and peace" ("Guardians" 242).<sup>15</sup> In choosing a red petticoat, Coosaponakeesa began her first diplomatic meeting vibrantly adorned in the Creek diplomatic "male" color of war -- quite the opposite of the exploitable poor and female subject the Georgians read in Coosaponakeesa's strange apparel.

Coosaponakeesa's color choice did not automatically indicate that she was declaring war upon the colonists. In explicating Creek duality, George E. Lankford explains that balance instead of competition defines the relationship between dual categories: "As seems to be true of most dual oppositional thought, the goal is to maintain a workable balance between the opposing forces or worlds. The opposition is not one which is envisioned as temporary, with one to become a victor over the other, but a

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<sup>14</sup> Because red and white occur at various structural points, many Creek men would transition between red and white mindsets, relating to a situation through not only personal character and desires, but also through assigned roles. As Lankford clarifies, "The point is not to be red or white, but red and white" ("Red and White," 78).

<sup>15</sup> A small number of women achieved the official status of beloved woman or chief after being recognized for their achievement of peace. Queen Senauky, mentioned in a contemporaneous document, appears to have been one such woman.

permanent tension of opposites which need to be kept in balance" (77).<sup>16</sup> In this respect, while she chose a red petticoat, Coosaponakeesa's subsequent willingness to mediate between the Yamacraw *mico* Tomochichi and Oglethorpe, an act that helped lead to a partnership between the two groups and a Georgian settlement on Yamacraw land, stressed her readiness to adapt her behavior to the future actions of the colonists. At the same time, her red attire sent a signal to her people that she would continue to advocate for their interests. Having experienced firsthand the costly Tuscarora and Yamasee wars of the 1710s -- wars caused in part by traders' abuse of Indians throughout the region -- and now seeing their interpreter in red, the observing Yamacraws would have conceivably recalled the potential for economic mistreatment from traders. Coosaponakeesa's diplomatic actions after Oglethorpe's arrival occurred in the presence of that memory and perhaps reassured her Yamacraw and eventual Creek allies that she, too, would fight for fair and vigorous trade.

To the scholarly eye reading cultural and historical context, this confluence of meaning in a single object of red apparel suggests Coosaponakeesa's experience as an active participant in trade, her personal willingness to declare war, her ability to push the quotidian limits of gender roles -- Creek as well as English -- and her claiming of an uncommon (though not unheard of) leadership role. In other words, her wearing of the red petticoat was and remains a charged performative act, one that she supplemented in following years and one that can be traced in her diplomatic and legal writings. By

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<sup>16</sup> For Creeks, the core dual balance must be struck between Upper and Lower Worlds. In the major anthropological work *The Southeastern Indians*, Charles Hudson summarizes the Upper World as representing "structure, expectableness, boundaries, limits, periodicity, order stability, and past time" whereas the Lower World represents "inversions, madness, invention, fertility, disorder, change, and future time" (127-8).

examining these writings, one can see the red petticoat's symbolic suggestions pervade her textual choices. Integrating Creek concepts of community and English words and genres, Coosaponakeesa's texts materially create and structure relationships between Creek and Georgians, and thereby intervene in the region's emergent mercantile economy. She asserts a vision of economic exchange that relies upon Creek ways of relating. Yet when the colonial government does not fulfill its obligations, she exploits the flexibility of Creek kinship to reformulate and even threaten those same relationships.<sup>17</sup>

*The "wealth of these realms": Georgia, the Creek Nation, and Deerskins*

In the eighteenth century, before and during the early years of Georgia's colonial period, Creek country "comprised a large portion of the present states of Alabama and Georgia; it was bounded on the north by the lands of the Cherokees, on the west by the Choctaw and Chickasaw nations, on the east by the English settlements, and on the south by the Spanish and French outposts and the broken tribes of the Florida peninsula" (qtd. in Womack 29-30).<sup>18</sup> From the British perspective, this area appeared as something of a no-man's land, an uncertain frontier which placed the stability of affluent South Carolina in jeopardy due to the presence of sometimes violent indigenous peoples, including Creeks, who affiliated and traded fluidly with the various European empires vying for a

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<sup>17</sup> In using the term "kinship," I refer to Daniel Heath Justice's (Cherokee) definition: "[K]inship isn't a static thing; it's dynamic, ever in motion. It requires attentiveness; kinship is best thought of as a verb rather than a noun, because kinship, in most indigenous contexts, is something that's done more than something that simply *is*" ("Go Away Water!," 150).

<sup>18</sup> Womack's original source is Angie Debo's *The Road to Disappearance* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1941), 3.

piece of the land's wealth.

In order to provide a buffer for South Carolina, which had recently experienced several extended confrontations with the Indians, including the Tuscarora and Yamasee Wars, British Trustees chartered Georgia, a territory between South Carolina and Spanish-occupied Florida. Georgia's original settlement occurred in 1733 under the personal leadership of Governor James Oglethorpe. This region was on the periphery of Creek territory and was occupied by a splinter band, the Yamacraws, led by the aged *mico* Tomochichi. In order to regain standing with the Creeks, Tomochichi eagerly partnered with Oglethorpe and helped broker a treaty with several crucial Lower Creek *talwas*, therefore placing the Yamacraws at the center of Georgia-Creek relations and trade. From these relatively peaceful beginnings, Georgia spread through settlements and military outposts into surrounding regions.

To become a stable colony, Georgia needed to attract settlers. To attract settlers, Georgia needed a commodity which would be the foundation of prosperity for the settlers. The colonial charter claims that the poor English peoples targeted by promotional activities "would be glad to settle in any of our provinces in America where, by cultivating lands at present waste and desolate, they might not only gain a comfortable subsistence for themselves and families, but also strengthen our colonies and increase the trade, navigation, and wealth of these realms" (Candler *Colonial Records* 11). The linchpin of a prosperous Georgia was the deerskin trade. A series of cattle plagues in Europe during the early eighteenth century caused the British government to severely restrict cowhide importation. In light of the cowhide shortage and the popularity of

tanned deerskin for "clothing and other uses," demand for American deerskins rose sharply (Braund *Deerskins* 42).

Creek *talwas* and other southeastern tribes were a key component of Britain's mercantilist deerskin trade-vision for the region. Indians would obtain deerskins and then bring them to trading outposts in order to exchange them for manufactured goods. In response, Creek economic systems changed drastically. Before becoming active partners with European empires, Creeks depended upon hunting and agriculture to abundantly provide their needs. However, partnering with Europeans in their mercantilist economy produced what Braund calls a complex mixture of "[p]ower and dependence":

The Creeks did not abandon their past, but the trade -- and the alliances it represented -- brought subtle changes and introduced new elements into the Muscogulge [Creek] world. By the eighteenth century, cloth and metal tools had become essentials. Guns, bought with deerskins, made the Muscogulges the preeminent power in the Southeast. But Creek power rested solely on the technology of outsiders. Power and dependence proved to be the greatest contrast of all. The deerskin trade -- more than ancient traditions, lifeways, and alliances -- became the dominant force in Creek destiny. (*Deerskins* 25)

Braund's words importantly highlight the Creeks' investment in partnering with English mercantilism. Through trade, they could acquire items such as copper pots, pieces of cloth, and guns. To expand their trading capabilities and acquire larger numbers of deerskins, they reorganized their hunting patterns. Women's traditional role in processing



deerskins ensured their importance to this trade and even meant that some women traveled with their husbands on hunting trips. Indian tribes, including Creeks, also brought enslaved Indians from other tribes to white colonists as an object of trade. The desire to increase diplomatic power in territorial and economic negotiations and to resist reverse enslavement caused the Creek *talwas* to centralize power somewhat, frequently acting in concert as opposed to autonomously until Removal in 1830. While white colonists were not a daily part of most Creeks' lives, the cultural adaptations performed in response to mercantilism were omnipresent, making this economic framework pervasive throughout the entire region.

*Their Rightful and Natural Princess: The Creek Woman Coosaponakeesa*

Born early in the eighteenth century, Coosaponakeesa was the daughter of Edward Griffin, an Indian trader, and a Tuckabatchee Creek woman (Baine 432).<sup>19</sup> After spending her early years among the Creeks, she "was brought down by her father from the Indian Nation to Pomponne in South Carolina, and there baptized, educated, and bred up in the principles of Christianity" (Jones 386). Though she does not say so, one suspects that she resided at her father's trading post. Her education was likely similar to

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<sup>19</sup> For information about Coosaponakeesa's early years, I use Rodney Baine's "Myths of Mary Musgrove" as a primary source. Baine provides perhaps the most considered account of Coosaponakeesa's early life, correcting other authors who have unquestioningly repeated myths begun by Coosaponakeesa and her third husband, Thomas Bosomworth, as well as some of Georgia's historians. Baine cites David H. Corkran, *The Creek Frontier, 1540-1783* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1967), 63 and *The Carolina Indian Frontier* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1970), 39 for myths about Coosaponakeesa's parentage and William Bacon Stevens, *A History of Georgia*, Vol. 1 (New York: D. Appleton, 1867), 227-8 for myths about Coosaponakeesa's early years with John Musgrove. Baine also points out that Coosaponakeesa and Bosomworth capitalized on English misunderstandings of Creek clan relationships and terminology to claim an Anglicized royal ("Queen of the Creeks") ancestry for Coosaponakeesa and to legitimize her land claims (see Baine 428-30).

most Christian educations given to Indians. In *Indian Education in the American Colonies, 1607-1783*, Margaret Connell Szasz speculates that "Carolina schoolmasters with Indian pupils [. . .] likely taught the rudiments of a reading school curriculum" (141). Most of these schoolmasters were in Carolina on behalf of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPGFP) and "would have instructed the young Indians in the English language, in reading and writing (probably by means of a New England Primer), and perhaps in ciphering" (Szasz 141). These skills would have been beneficial to Coosaponakeesa as an Indian trader and as a diplomat and interpreter for the English.

At some point before 1725, she married John Musgrove, another mixed-blood Creek and the "son of a Tuckesaw or Apalachicola Creek woman" and Colonel John Musgrove (Baine 433).<sup>20</sup> In June 1732, at the request of Tomochichi and under the auspices of the South Carolina colonial governor, Coosaponakeesa and Musgrove began their trading post on the Yamacraw bluff overlooking the Savannah River.<sup>21</sup>

When Oglethorpe encountered her on the Yamacraw bluff in 1733, she and her first husband, the mixed-blood Creek John Musgrove, had been operating their trading post since 1732. Coosaponakeesa played an active role in Georgia-Creek relations during

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<sup>20</sup> Tuckabatchee was located at the bend of Tallapoosa River in Georgia where it moves northward. Though Hudson describes it as "an important Lower Creek chiefdom" (369), this location physically connects it to the Upper Creeks via water, perhaps explaining some of its import as a *talwa* connecting the Upper Creeks to Coweta and the Lower Creeks. According to John R. Swanton, the Tuckabatchee "town or tribe" may have moved there from the Coosa River in present day Alabama (*Indians*, 197). The town remained at this location until it moved to Oklahoma during removal and established "their Square Ground in the southeastern part of the Creek territory near Melette post office, but later they moved to Yeager north of Holdenville" (Swanton, *Indians*, 197).

<sup>21</sup> Between her marriage and 1732, the couple probably resided in South Carolina where Musgrove, along with his Apalachicola Creek uncle, had been managing his legitimate, white half-brother's property (Baine 433, Jones 387).

Oglethorpe's tenure and a somewhat less active, but still prominent role under subsequent leaders. Besides interpreting and helping Oglethorpe relate to the Yamacraws and the Creeks, she ran several trading posts, assisted during trade and land negotiations, and helped enlist (or delay) Creek military support for British struggles with other Indian tribes or European powers in the region. For example, during the War of Jenkins' Ear with Spain -- a war in which she lost her second husband, her trading post, her property, and her brother -- she interpreted and helped enlist Creeks to fight for the English.<sup>22</sup>

Coosaponakeesa had influence and standing with the Lower Creeks as well as the English colonists. Her matrilineal relationship to prominent Creek leaders in Coweta, a relationship that she told the colonists made her a "rightful and natural Princess," added to her influence (Jones 385). By helping to produce written versions of land claims and schedules of prices for traded goods, she stabilized Creek *talwas* and expanded trade. Lower Creek *micos* gave her authority in negotiating land settlements on their behalf and trusted her during negotiations to relate and explain the contents of English-language documents. Ultimately, various Lower Creek *micos* (though not all) rewarded her by granting her territorial claims to several coastal islands -- Ossabaw, St. Catherine's, and Sapelo -- south of Savannah and at the fringes of Creek territory.

These islands became the focus of a long legal battle between Coosaponakeesa and Georgia's administrators. In the mid-1740s, shortly after marrying her third husband Thomas Bosomworth, a white Englishman, she filed the first of many memorials with the

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<sup>22</sup> In the War of Jenkins' Ear, the British government used an incident in which the Spanish colonial Coast Guard cut off British Captain Robert Jenkins' ear as an excuse to open hostilities against Spain and attempt to gain possession of Spanish colonies in the Americas. Despite its somewhat absurd name, the war lasted several years.

colonial government and requested restitution for her services to the colony. The "Bosomworth Controversy," as it is known to historians of Georgia, occupies much paper and archival space. In addition to these memorials, Coosaponakeesa and her husband filed copious articles of documentation (including transcriptions of colonial records, letters, and government journals as well as affidavits from Creek leaders, fellow translators, and Indian traders). They threatened Georgia by accompanying a delegation of somewhat hostile Creeks to Savannah in order to underscore their claims. Eventually, Governor Henry Ellis settled with Coosaponakeesa by giving her the proceeds from the sale of two of the islands as well as the deed to St. Catherine's. Coosaponakeesa died soon after.<sup>23</sup>

Most scholarship about Coosaponakeesa, especially prior to the twenty-first century, represents her as a figure of Georgia history. Such scholarship praises her invaluable services as diplomat, mediator, and interpreter during her early years and deplores the controversy surrounding her restitution claims in later years. In these histories, her name is almost invariably associated with her "disruptive" and "greedy" suits; in discussions of the Bosomworth Controversy, she is regularly painted as a pawn of Bosomworth.<sup>24</sup> As in John Pitts Corry's article "Some New Light on the Bosomworth

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<sup>23</sup> For an especially detailed biography and discussion of the Bosomworth Controversy, see Fisher. For an example of a filing that includes multiple memorials and affidavits, see Candler, *Original Papers*, 465-502.

<sup>24</sup> For an example of a scholar emphasizing Coosaponakeesa's "disruptiveness," see Coulter, "Mary Musgrove." Coulter dramatically tells the story of Coosaponakeesa, peppering his recounting with sarcasm and insults, mostly for Coosaponakeesa and her husbands. Despite his questionable language, Coulter's essay does underscore Native women's roles beyond a romanticized Pocahontas-style subject of sexual trade. For a moderate treatment, see Corry, "Bosomworth Claims." A recent impressive collection, *Feminist Interventions in Early American Studies*, includes an essay on the history of Coosaponakeesa as a cultural figure; see A. Hudson, "Imagining Mary Musgrove." For a romanticized treatment of Coosaponakeesa, see Helen Todd's biography *Mary Musgrove, Indian Princess* (Larlin, 1981). For another example, see Pamela Bauer Mueller's work of historical fiction, *An Angry Drum Echoed: Mary Musgrove*,

Claims," focused considerations of Coosaponakeesa which more deeply engage with archival materials often find that "there was much justice in Mary's original [land claims]" (Corry 224). However, many authors still tend to minimize her intellect and self-control, and to emphasize her "greed" for land. Despite these numerous (if not always thorough) historiographic treatments, no one has closely analyzed her writings,<sup>25</sup> even Craig Womack's (Muskogee Creek/Cherokee) *Red on Red: Native Literary Separatism* (1999), a book dedicated to recovering Creek authorship, overlooks Coosaponakeesa, perhaps because he was unaware of her extant writings or because he chose to focus on later centuries.

This absence of literary scrutiny may be due to scholars' lack of awareness about the wealth of material which Coosaponakeesa wrote into the British bureaucratic archive or their privileging of certain genres over others.<sup>26</sup> Yet a sifting of colonial archives, much of it published, reveals a variety of documents bearing Coosaponakeesa's varying

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*Queen of the Creeks* (St. Simon's Island, Georgia: Piñata 2007), which, according to the book jacket, retells the story of Coosaponakeesa's "unrequited" love for Oglethorpe and her "relentless march" upon Savannah for justice.

<sup>25</sup> For a possible exception, see Sharon Harris's brief introduction in *American Women Writers to 1800* to what she believes is Coosaponakeesa's only surviving text, a 1734 letter to Oglethorpe (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996. 118).

<sup>26</sup> A third possibility is disbelief in Coosaponakeesa's authorship of these materials. The presence of co-signers in other documents and colonial complaints about Thomas Bosomworth's corruption of his wife perhaps undermine their belief in her solitary authorship. Ignoring signed and unsigned documents is problematic in a variety of ways. First and foremost, it holds her to a stricter standard of individual authorship than scholars have done with other authors, such as in the classic case of T. S. Eliot who was greatly assisted by Ezra Pound. Second, it causes us to lose this valuable literary resource in terms of an originary moment of indigenous authorship in English. Third, it underestimates Coosaponakeesa as an author, as an individual, and as a woman. Creeks' continually refer to Coosaponakeesa's, not Bosomworth's, invaluable service to them, undermining those who believe her to be a tool of Bosomworth's greed. Might we not just as easily assume that Coosaponakeesa capitalized upon Bosomworth's knowledge of legal rhetoric and used his English citizenship to add justification for colonial recognition to her land claims? Therefore, while recognizing the fraught circumstances of authorship during this period, I also consider any piece of writing crafted by her or through her as fair interpretive game.

signatures.<sup>27</sup> She leaves behind a letter to Oglethorpe written in July of 1734; various restitution memorials, the first from August 10, 1747; interpreter reports, some of which she co-signs; and two 1752 letters to James Glen, colonial Governor of South Carolina. Along with these documents, Coosaponakeesa translated talks by Tomochichi, the Yamacraw *mico*, and Chikelly, the Coweta *mico*; in addition, she participated in various treaty conversations. Especially in a period lacking Creek-English dictionaries and deep cultural contact to provide guidance in linguistic and cultural translation, we must consider these latter documents -- translations, interpreter reports, and treaties -- as emerging from acts of authorship as surely as Coosaponakeesa's formal correspondence.

In my reading of this woman who must be counted as one of the earliest Native authors in English, I focus on her earliest documents, when her rhetorical strategies most actively shaped Georgia-Creek relations. My project does not, however, seek to justify or condemn her actions, which, in addition to being acts of sovereignty on behalf of the Creeks, also at times included undermining other Indian nations' economies in order to promote her own, selling alcohol to her fellow Creeks, enlisting Creek military support against other tribes who fought on the side of Britain's imperial rivals, and in some ways advancing British colonization in Georgia and South Carolina. Nor do I seek to defy her self-identification as Creek and her people's unquestioned acceptance of that identity and bring her writings into the Anglo-American literary canon. Instead, I follow Womack's model, which "emphasizes unique Native worldviews and political realities, searches for differences as often as similarities, and attempts to find Native literature's place in Indian

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<sup>27</sup> See *The Colonial Records of Georgia*, volumes 1-36.

country, rather than Native literature's place in the canon" (11). By considering Coosaponakeesa as a Creek woman who has acquired English tools -- paper, pen, and literacy -- I argue that she promotes a vibrant trade environment for her Creek community by inserting the idiom of Creek kinship into diplomatic and legal texts. Since relatively few documents by Coosaponakeesa or other Creeks remain from this period and our knowledge of Creek culture is necessarily limited, I use folklore studies, historiography, and anthropology to read this material deeply and imaginatively, believing that only in this way can we recover the historically influential and rhetorically powerful performances of sovereignty that Coosaponakeesa and other Creeks enacted in colonial America.

*From Friendly Trade to Infanticide: The Kinship of Commerce in Coosaponakeesa's Writings*

In 1733, Coosaponakeesa helped negotiate "Oglethorpe's First Treaty with the Lower Creeks at Savannah" through her role as diplomat and interpreter. These "Articles of Friendship and Commerce" formalize the trade affiliation between Georgia and the Lower Creeks, and involve promises on both sides (Juricek 15). While many portions are adaptations of other treaties with South Carolina, the fourth, or land settlement, clause of the treaty specifically addresses British territory acquisition and is unique to this treaty. The land settlement clause is also unique in the context of the treaty as a whole. Copied from previous documents, other clauses in this treaty have more clearly identifiable goals and fewer references to Creek beliefs. They include price schedules and provisions for

criminal justice, treaty violations, and runaway slaves. However, in the fourth clause, Creek kinship and understandings of land form the logical foundations. This clause archives a Creek infiltration into an English legal document.

As chief interpreter during this portion of the negotiation, Coosaponakeesa chose the English translations that would encapsulate what the Lower Creek leaders wanted embedded in this contract.<sup>28</sup> She may even have encouraged Creek leaders to negotiate for a formal land agreement since experience with whites' understanding of land as property may have indicated the value of such a clause. She undoubtedly observed encroachment upon Indian land by white settlers in South Carolina, where no such treaty clauses existed. Because it emerged under Coosaponakeesa's linguistic and diplomatic guidance and can provide insight into her vision of intercultural trade and relationships, I provide the land settlement clause in its entirety:

Fourthly. We the Head Men of the Coweta and Cussita Towns in behalf of all the Lower Creek Nation being firmly persuaded that He who lives in Heaven and is the occasion of all good things has moved the hearts of the Trustees to send their Beloved men among us for the good of us our Wives and Children and to Instruct us and them in what is Streight do therefore declare that we are glad that their People are come here, and though this Land belongs to us the Lower Creeks yet we that we may be instructed by

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<sup>28</sup> In his introduction to these early documents, Juricek describes how “this treaty was closely patterned after the Creek treaty negotiated in 1717 by Oglethorpe’s friend and collaborator, Governor Johnson of South Carolina” (4). Article four where the two groups lay out terms for future transfers of territory from Creeks to English colonists, has no counterpart in the 1717 treaty (Juricek 4). Juricek also reasons, “If [Coosaponakeesa] was not the chief interpreter for the formal conference, she evidently was the interpreter for the land agreement” (4).



them do consent and agree that they shall make use of and possess all those Lands which our Nation hath not occasion for to use and we make over unto them their Successors and Assigns all such Lands and Territories as we shall have no occasion to use, Provided always that they upon Settling every New Town shall set out for the use of ourselves and the People of our Nation such Lands as shall be agreed upon between their Beloved Men and the head men of our Nation and that those Lands shall remain to us forever. (Juricek 15)

The article begins by expressing satisfaction that contact between English and Creeks, especially Creek women and children, has occurred and desire for those contacts to continue. The article then formalizes an agreement that the English may occupy lands that the Lower Creeks "hath not occasion for to use" so long as the English settlements continue to reserve an adjacent portion, to be agreed on by the English and Creek leaders, that "shall remain to us forever."<sup>29</sup> This opening underscores interpersonal relationships and therefore implies that sustainable trade arises from the kind of personal knowledge that defines mutually beneficial communitarian interaction. By moving from relationships to the topic of land, the clause subtly connects relationships and trade to geographic proximity.

The nature of these envisioned connections, moreover, emerges pointedly from Creek culture. In emphasizing that the whites are "among us," including "Wives and

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<sup>29</sup> Rather unsurprisingly given English cultural attitudes, not all English settlements honored this agreement, a form of treaty violation which led to various moments of conflict throughout the early years of the colony. The Salzburger settlements of Old and New Ebenezer are perfect examples.

Children," the clause establishes for the record that the colonists are moving into Creek homeland. To detect an underlying element of the Creek worldview in this phrasing, it is important to recall that Creek culture is matrilineal: when a man and a woman marry, the man moves in with the woman's household or compound, any children that result from the union belonging to the wife's matrilineage and, by extension, her clan.<sup>30</sup> While fathers retain much material responsibility and emotional connection to their children, the wife's male relatives in her matrilineage, especially her brothers, are the most important male figures in the children's lives. In the Creek matrilineal culture, matrilineages directly and indirectly govern cropland distribution, residences, inheritances, hunting territories, justice, social responsibilities, leadership, and marriages through kinship and clans. From this perspective, then, the reference to "Wives and Children" within the land settlement clause demonstrates that the Creeks can already begin to claim a form of modified kinship with white settlers since some whites have been in contact with their women and children, the units through whom kin attachments are made and claimed. I will call this modified kinship "friendship," the term used in the treaty. In calling for continued contact with women and children and for portions of land to be set aside for Creeks alongside white settlements, the clause institutes a mechanism through which this friendship will continue.

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<sup>30</sup> According to Braund, "[c]lans were composed of matrilineages that possessed a common, though distant and usually mythical, ancestor. Clans were represented by animals, such as Bear, Eagle, Wolf, and Tyger (panther). One of the most powerful clans was associated with a natural phenomenon, the Wind. Only four clan names are mentioned in colonial records—Wind, Tyger, Bear, and Eagle—although numerous other clans appear frequently in later records" (*Deerskins* 11). See Braund, Chapter 1: "The Eighteenth-Century Muscogulges" (*Deerskins* 3-25) and Hudson, Chapter 4: "Social Organization" (184-257) for more in depth discussions of kinship, clans, and matrilineages.

Interestingly, the land settlement clause also establishes a difference between land that "belongs to us the Lower Creeks" and "possess[ion]" of land. The implication here is that the land will *always* belong to the Creeks even as English colonists temporarily possess and use it. This distinction seems to place colonists in the position of Creek husbands, whose contributions to the community never gain them full right to their wives' matrilineages but whose entrance into already established Creek territorial divisions help bind clans, families, and communities. As a Creek woman, Coosaponakeesa has not only inserted the concept of modified Creek kinship into a colonial document but has also formulated relationships that seem markedly feminine in their placement of matrilineage at their foundation. This interpretation is further supported by Coosaponakeesa's role as mediator instead of as public political leader: her role in these negotiations emerges from traditional Creek womanhood, which seeks to influence through relationships and to impel and perhaps shame male leaders into acting as the women desire.

Ultimately, what this clause argues is that *proximity* is a crucial component of stable, prosperous trade. Proximity leads to personal acts of exchange. Personal acts of exchange lead to familiarity. Familiarity leads to intimacy. Intimacy leads to friendship. This trajectory toward friendship would have been particularly apparent and reasonable to Coosaponakeesa, a mixed-blood woman who spent significant portions of her life residing at Indian trading posts.

Another document from this period, a familiar letter from Coosaponakeesa to Oglethorpe, similarly understands and structures trade through kinship. On July 17, 1734, Coosaponakeesa wrote a letter to Oglethorpe about a diplomatic discussion

between some Choctaws and English colonists. According to this band of Choctaws, trade with the French had stagnated, and so they were looking for a new European trading partner. Since the Choctaws had a decades-long history of trading with and militarily supporting the French, these talks appeared to be a crucial turning point in the region's balance of colonial power.<sup>31</sup> Oglethorpe could not be present for these talks because he was in England at the time, where he was reporting to the colonial Trustees and shepherding Tomochichi and other Yamacraws on a state visit. Because the Choctaw meeting could not have been interpreted by Coosaponakeesa -- she did not speak Choctaw as far as we know -- and she was not a key player in discussions, the reason for her writing this letter is unclear. Perhaps it is the only surviving portion of a series of letters she wrote to Oglethorpe to keep him informed during his absence.

Coosaponakeesa begins the letter by establishing an intermediary position for herself. She announces, "I make bold to acquaint You that Thos. Jones is returned from the Choctaws and according to your Honours Desire he has brought the Choctaws down and they have received great favours" (Coleman and Ready 63). Coosaponakeesa's position as writer and communicator appears in the fact that she is "acquaint[ing]" Oglethorpe instead of acting on his behalf or on Indians' behalf, Choctaw, Creek, or Yamacraw. This opening sentence lends the letter a tone of impartiality toward the outcome of the talks and implies that her comments are disinterested.

The remainder of the paragraph, however, subtly ridicules the Choctaws, elevates

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<sup>31</sup> Ultimately, the group of Choctaws referenced in this letter were a group of tribal outlaws most likely seeking refuge. The relationship between French and Choctaws remained fairly close until the Seven Years' War in the mid-1750s.

the Creeks, and flatters the colonists. This process begins with a description of the Choctaws' happiness in talking with the English: "[T]he Choctaws are so glad that some white People whom they call'd their Masters has taken such Care of them as to send for them and they was very glad of the opportunity to come for they lived very poor before and now they are in good hopes to live as well as the other Indians do, for they had nor have no Trade with the French and their Skins lye by them and rot" (Coleman and Ready 63).<sup>32</sup> Through her authorial choices, Coosaponakeesa characterizes the Choctaws as weak. In the first place, they have, according to her, admitted inferiority to the colonists by gladly calling them "Masters." By choosing this word, Coosaponakeesa underscores the lack of value in this potential connection by drawing a line of relationship, but not of kinship, between Choctaws and colonists. Kinship means obligation; with no kinship, there is little or no obligation. Then, when she subsequently claims that the Choctaws need someone to care for them, she implies that the English, being under no obligation to fulfill their need, can choose whether or not to do so solely on practicality. And since, as she goes on to suggest, it would in fact be impractical to trade with the Choctaws -- who, unlike other Indians, "live very poor[ly]" and, in perhaps their greatest transgression, have so ineptly negotiated in trade and are so unaware of the value of their commodity that their deerskins "lye by them and rot" -- Coosaponakeesa's meaning is clear: while she

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<sup>32</sup> According to the official colonial translation and account, the Choctaw "King" said, "[W]e are very glad that the English have taken notice of us. We have wanted an opportunity to make peace: but being come a great way we were not able to bring any presents. I belong to a great Nation and all my People are ready to confirm what I say, we are very glad you have sent to good a Man as Thomas Jones [official Georgia representative] to us. We are surrounded with White People and the French are building Forts which we do not like. We are come to see who are our friends and whose Protection we may rely on. We desire a trade very much that a Path may be kept betwixt you and us. And that you may see we come with good hearts we have brought our Women with us" (Juricek 36).

acknowledges Oglethorpe's "Desire" to establish friendly ties with the Choctaws, she subtly criticizes that desire by demonstrating the unworthiness and untrustworthiness of the Choctaws (Coleman and Ready 63).

In contrast, the letter also hints at the wisdom of Oglethorpe's maintaining a primary trade relationship with Coosaponakeesa's people. She begins this argument in the above quotation when she states that the Choctaws do not "live as well as the other Indians do." In Savannah, the other Indians are Creeks. The fact that Creeks live well demonstrates that the current trading partnership is a prosperous one. A few sentences later, Coosaponakeesa directly establishes a distinction between the Choctaws and the Creeks. She writes, "The Choctaws are all amazed to see the Creeks drink as they do, and they think the Creeks are saucy to the white People" (Coleman and Ready 63). Her reference to her fellow Creeks' behavior sounds boastful. Such a tone, especially in light of the other sentence, results in a nuanced contrast: the Creeks do not consider the English colonists to be their masters and therefore are capable of standing in a kinship relation to them, with its mutual and binding obligations, in ways the hapless and subordinate Choctaws cannot.

While others have mined the paragraph I have just analyzed for historiographic insight into Indian-Anglo relationships,<sup>33</sup> I would argue that the remainder of the letter is crucial to a full understanding of how these subtle distinctions between Choctaws and Creeks become an argument for a continued trade relationship between Creeks and Georgians. In the second paragraph, discussing various events, Coosaponakeesa

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<sup>33</sup> For an example, see Juricek, *Georgia Treaties*, 28-29.

abandons the topic of the Choctaws and emphasizes her connection to Oglethorpe. She writes, "The Colony is in good health and I hope your Honour and all your family is in good health and my Husband is the same, and I beg your Honour will take great Care of him" (Coleman and Ready 64). Here, she claims kinship to Oglethorpe through textual and real proximity: the textual proximity of the various references to familial components -- "I," "your Honour," "all your family," "my Husband" -- highlight the real proximity of Oglethorpe's family with her Husband. This places Oglethorpe and her into a kinship by extension; their families are connected. And since kinship means obligation in Creek culture, this sentence reminds Oglethorpe of his obligation to care for her husband: by writing the letter, she has honored her obligations and provided him with information, and now, presumably, he is obliged in return. In moving from the topic of Choctaws, Creeks, and Georgia to the familiar, even intimate, language of family, Coosaponakeesa's letter implies that primary trade between Creeks and Georgians is not only practical, but natural due to the special kinship bond of friendship.

Coosaponakeesa produced these texts during a period of peace with Oglethorpe and Georgia. A decade later, after Oglethorpe returned to England and she received neither immediate recognition of her land claims nor monetary compensation for her services to the colony, she began to write letters more personally and less communally motivated. However, even in those letters, she continued to refer to kinship and friendship to support her demands. Most of the letters took the form of memorials, documents that were expressions of facts in support of a petition.<sup>34</sup> One early (and

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<sup>34</sup> See "memorial" (definition 5.b) in the *OED*.

perhaps the earliest) memorial is "To the Honorable Lieut: Col<sup>n</sup> Heron, Commander in Chief of his Majesty's forces in the Province of Georgia," dated August 10, 1747. In this memorial, she begins by formalizing her kinship to the leaders of the Lower Creek Nation. She next emphasizes both the loyalty of the Creeks to the British in the past and the continued importance of Creek friendship "to the British Interest" (Juricek 140). She reminds Heron of her centrality in establishing and maintaining that friendship, then goes on to provide a detailed personal history that includes her childhood, marriages, and various services to Georgia. In the context of this history, she makes note of her financial investments and frequent losses, often incurred after sacrificing personal interests to British interests. She then tallies her exact investment at £5714 17s 11p and requests remuneration. After this narrative and culminating calculation, Coosaponakeesa suggests how Heron can help, justifies her anger and indignation at Britain, and concludes with a not-so-veiled threat to disally the Creeks with the British, an act that would leave the colony open to attack from other Indian and European nations.

The fact that previous documents established a (constructed) *friendship* instead of a true (natural) *kinship* between Creeks and Georgians is the rhetorical linchpin of this document. Now that Coosaponakeesa is clearly on the red path with Georgia's government, she chooses to undermine that friendship and show its tenuousness. Her first step in doing so is to align herself, through *untenuous* kinship, with the Creeks. Her opening paragraphs explain that she "was born at the Coweta Town on the Oakmulgee River, which is a branch of the Alatomaha and the chief-town of the Creek Indian nation. That she is by descent on the Mother's side (who was sister to the old Emperor) of the



same blood with the present Micos and chiefs now in that nation, and by their laws and the voice of the whole people is esteemed their rightful and natural Princess" (Jones 385). These lines not only declare her familial relationship to Creek leadership but underscore that *this* kinship is through her matrilineage. Soon after, she reminds her reader that the "friendship and alliance" between the Creeks and the Georgians is based on "several treaties" (Jones 386). The ephemerality of paper documents contrasts with the "natural" relationship Coosaponakeesa claims with the Creeks and the land.

Significantly, when Coosaponakeesa subtly threatens the British government in the next paragraph by reminding her reader of the importance of the Creek alliance in maintaining regional balance of power with the French and Spanish colonial forces, she asserts that these forces "have been for some time past and are at this juncture laboring by all the artifices imaginable to seduce that [Creek] nation from their alliance with his Majesty's subjects" (Jones 386). The allusions to "artifices" and "seduc[ti]on" suggest again that the colonists are like husbands entering a matrilineage's settlement, where their right to remain is indeed tenuous. As Charles Hudson notes: "Among the Creeks as among other matrilineal people, marriages were somewhat fragile and divorce was rather common" (Hudson 200). Like a husband, the colonists' right to reside on the land lasts only so long as they maintain a mutually contented relationship with their Creek partners.

Despite all these veiled threats to sever ties between her community and Georgia, Coosaponakeesa still insists that Georgia can avoid losing its Creek alliance. Though by natural law she is a Creek, she reminds her reader that "your Memorialist by the laws of Great Britain is a subject of that Crown" (Jones 386). She then supports Britain's

responsibility to her by listing in detail the "many signal proofs of her zeal and loyalty" (Jones 386). For example, she writes:

That after the war with Spain, the [military] services of the Indians were so constantly needed, that no advantage could be made by the trade [she conducted on the Alatomaha River]; that she constantly employed her interest to bring down her friends from the nation to fight against his Majesty's enemies, which, since the war they have so annoyed, that they have been a strong barrier against the designs of the Spaniards, as must be allowed by every person. (Jones 386)

As in many other examples, she is careful to note how her services to the community have both negatively impacted her personal assets and contributed to the colony's safety.

The most crucial moment in the document, however, occurs after Coosaponakeesa has offered these rhetorical reminders that she is a natural Creek and a valuable subject of Britain. In this subsequent section, she invokes British abuse of her friendship to justify her current paper war and a possible future war between nations, promoted through her Creek influence:

And lastly your Memorialist cannot help repeating with an equal mixture of grief of heart and indignation that her wrongs have scarcely a parallel in the history of the British Government. Language is too weak to represent her present case. She labors under every sense of injury and circumstances of distress, being insulted, abused, and despised by the ungrateful people who are indebted to her for every blessing they enjoy.

The only return she has met with for her past services and maternal affection has been unjust loads of infamy; -- branded by the name of traitor for making pretension to rights to which she is entitled by the laws of God and Nature. (Jones 390-1)

Through these words, Coosaponakeesa initiates a rhetorical shift of relationship between herself and Georgia. Her "grief of heart and indignation" personalizes Georgia's abuses and indicates that they are no longer wrong merely because of an abstract understanding of British justice. Her description of language as "too weak" underscores the implication that paper laws and rights are meaningless compared to feeling. Her usage of "labors" in the next sentence -- labor suggesting not only work but childbirth -- begins to suggest that Britain's abuses of her as a woman are particularly heinous. Her statement that the people of Georgia are "indebted to her for every blessing they enjoy" helps categorize Georgia as her child, the result of her "labor." This claim widens when she dramatically mentions her "maternal affection" in the next paragraph. British violations of the "laws of God and Nature" now appear to be acts of matricide -- a particularly heinous crime in a matrilineal culture like the Creeks'. In committing matricide, Coosaponakeesa strongly suggests, the colonists have severed their claims to kinship and clanship, and should be treated as outcasts.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Lankford does not recall ever reading any reference to matricide in Creek materials, but speculates, "The very notion is horrifying, and any account of such an occurrence might well not have been appropriate to share with Euroamericans. As you know, the Creeks were matrilineal, so to kill your mother would be to kill your only parent, thus cutting yourself off from your descent line. Moreover, such an act would also be the killing of a fellow clan member and your senior in your lineage, which would be almost unthinkable. Should such a thing happen, it would be adjudicated within the clan/lineage, I'm sure, and those outside might well never hear anything further about it (and the perpetrator might just never be seen again)" ("Re: Red and White," e-mail to the author, 8 Mar. 2008).

Coosaponakeesa's writings -- from those that structure a Creek-Georgian friendship to those that linguistically assert her maternal rights, declare personal war on her own child, and even threaten infanticide -- offer considerable insight into the Native presence and Native agency in early America, for through them, Coosaponakeesa consistently wrote Creek culture into colonial documents. Her writings can thus be seen as performances of national and personal sovereignty that must be read with attentiveness to tribal specificity. As evidence of national sovereignty, these documents underscore that Creeks were not inevitably and tragically swept away by British colonialism. Rather, they acted as economic and military partners, took advantage of new trade opportunities to adjust and strengthen their communities, and labored to promote the British presence in an effort to increase their own claims to power. As evidence of personal sovereignty, these documents show how Coosaponakeesa used her linguistic skills and cultural knowledge to become a vivid and active presence in the region. They expose the fallacy behind the colonists' first impression of her as an impoverished, exploitable female in strange attire. Her gender, she proved, was not a limitation, forcing her to remain on the sidelines, but a flexible identity through which she structured her interventions into Creek and Georgian communities and furthered what she saw as Creek interests. Ultimately, she played a vital part in performing Creek sovereignty through an independent voice grounded in her gender, her intercultural skills, and her subtle, powerful acts of trade and diplomacy.

- **Playing the Blues: Eliza Lucas Pinckney's Letterbook and Indigo**

### **Experimentation**

Writing from her family's Wappoo Creek plantation in 1742, the as-yet-unmarried Eliza Lucas Pinckney explains her biweekly round of activities to her friend Miss Mary Bartlett, a young lady on an extended visit from England and residing with Bartlett's aunt and uncle in Charleston. Lucas Pinckney begins by describing days full of practicing music, French, needlework, and short hand as well as her efforts to begin a school for slave children (34). This letterbook transcription provides a busy, domestic picture of a young white woman's privileged plantation life.<sup>36</sup>

After creating this picture of her daily life in the opening lines of her letter, Lucas Pinckney starts to qualify her routine. She mentions visits to neighbors and her ability to take along work without hearing criticism, and then notes that her nights and Thursdays are full of business activity (34-5). She even admits she has abandoned her complicated lappet weaving in favor of making shrimp nets (35).<sup>37</sup> Then, towards the end of her letter, surprised at her apparent lapse, Lucas Pinckney enthusiastically and somewhat self-deprecatingly alludes to another "amusement":

O! I had like to forgot the last thing I had done a great while. I have planted a large figg orchard with design to dry and export them. I have reckoned my expence and the prophets to arise from these figgs, but was I to tell you how great an Estate I am to make from this way, and how 'tis to

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<sup>36</sup> Before technological advances, letter writers used letterbooks to make record of their manuscript letters before sending them. In this chapter, memorandum refers to the notes or summaries Lucas Pinckney made about her letters while transcription refers to her word-for-word copying of excerpts or entire letters.

<sup>37</sup> Here, lappets are most likely the ribbons and streamers attached to a woman's headgear. Dancing ladies particularly wore them since they would stream around them as they danced. See "lappet" in the *OED*.

be laid out you would think me far gone in romance. Your good Uncle [Charles Pinckney] I know has long thought I have a fertile brain at schemeing. I only confirm him in his opinion; but I own I love the vegitable world extremely. I think it an innocent and useful amusement. Pray tell him, if he laughs much at my project, I never intend to have my hand in a silver mine and he will understand as well as you what I mean. (35).

Her exclamatory "O," claim of forgetfulness, and usage of words like "romance," "laughs," and "amusement" in this passage tonally connect her agricultural work to her perhaps more traditional elite feminine activities. She seems appropriately modest and gay. Yet the passage's topic -- fig experimentation and profit calculations -- may remind a reader, prepared by preceding remarks about business writing and shrimp nets, that her plantation existed on the colonial frontier.

There, the demands of mercantilism blurred the lines between proper and improper pursuits. Non-commercial botany was proper as an object of feminine interest. In her study of gender and botany, *Cultivating Women, Cultivating Science: Flora's Daughters and Botany in England, 1760-1860*, Ann B. Shteir reviews women's historical and more recent connections to botanical knowledge. She notes that "knowledge of plants had [long] been part of traditional women's work as healers," even if that traditional knowledge was on the wane by the mid-eighteenth-century (37). In a parallel

connection, art merged with science in women's botanical illustration.<sup>38</sup> Yet as Shteir's study makes clear, agricultural experimentation for commercial purposes was not a fashionable pursuit for elite British women. In fact, most studies of eighteenth-century colonial women's botanical pursuits, even when they occur in the midst of larger considerations of colonial botany's relationship to the British Empire, rarely consider the frankly commercial nature of these pursuits. In contrast, Lucas Pinckney's letter suggests that experimentation with agricultural commodities and even the drive for profits are part of a round of "innocent" heterosocial amusements in South Carolina. On the colonial frontier, Lucas Pinckney could exercise her "fertile" mind and green thumb in domesticating early South Carolina's commercial "vegetable world." Her pursuits may even confirm her position as a leisured, elite white woman, living off slave labor.

This letter characterizes a plantation life that is strange to English people but not other colonists of South Carolina, a place that was as "far gone in romance" as Lucas Pinckney, if by romance she means botany for profit. Still struggling to find a stable economy in 1742, South Carolina was a place where the elite amusement of agricultural experimentation was in fact crucial to the colony's future and prosperity. Therefore, Lucas Pinckney's fig orchard and other agrarian research projects appear to have been spaces where she could legitimately enter the masculinized world of mercantilist enterprise and contribute to the local and imperial economies.

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<sup>38</sup> Shteir references Elizabeth Blackwell's *A Curious Herbal* (1737-39) as a precise, documentary text (39). In South Carolina, Hannah English Williams sent specimens to a London apothecary, James Petiver, from 1701 to 1713. Some of these specimens appear in Petiver's *Gazophylacium Naturae et Artis*, a multivolume work which appeared between 1702 and 1709. See Beatrice Scheer Smith's "Hannah English Williams: America's First Woman Natural History Collector" (*South Carolina Historical Magazine* 87 (April 1986): 83-92).

I begin with this letter because it not only makes apparent the oftentimes frank yet unacknowledged commercialism of colonial women's botanical work, but also because I find something quite evocative about Lucas Pinckney's use of the phrase "far gone in romance" in such a context. These words suggest that she has been sweetly seduced by her work and its fiscal potential. While her choice of such personal language may be unsurprising since she is writing to a young lady visiting from England, an audience for whom she may wish to downplay the financial pragmatism of her experiments, the effect of her choice is to make her economic activities appear intimate.

In the remainder of this half of the chapter, I will explore the ways that intimacy infuses Lucas Pinckney's epistolary writing about her economic pursuits. I will trace how her letters craft a local community that foregrounds a shared investment in South Carolina's position within the mercantile economy and that requires a mastery of the landscape. I will begin with a clarification of what I mean by "mastery of the landscape" by briefly reviewing South Carolina's colonial history, its often urgent pursuit of new commodities, its particular and unpredictable climate, and its racial divisions. Next, I turn to a biography of Lucas Pinckney and discuss past scholarship about her life and writing. Finally, I turn to an examination of her mercantilist letters. I describe how she crafts a community that relies upon expertise, presence, and commitment to the "romance" of a profitable South Caroline mercantile economy dependent upon slave labor even as she carefully delimits who her vision excludes.



*A “‘polite and commercial’ people”: South Carolina’s Dream of Abundance*

In using the word "mastery" above, I refer simultaneously to both the expertise in local climate and agriculture *and* the racial hierarchy that Lucas Pinckney's letters insist is necessary for the community she imagines. These two components of mastery are readily apparent in a review of South Carolina's unique colonial history. In a 1666 pamphlet, *A Brief Description of the Province of Carolina, on the Coasts of Florida*, the unidentified author distinguishes the new Carolina colony from other colonies based upon stability of climate and quantity of fertile land. He (or she) writes, "This Province lying so neer *Virginia*, and yet more Southward, enjoys the fertility and advantages thereof; and yet is so far distant, as to be freed from the inconstancy of the Weather, which is a great cause of healthfulness thereof" (10). In comparing Carolina to Bermuda, the author assures the reader that, unlike that circumscribed island, Carolina is not a "Prison to the Inhabitants" (10). Located in a more temperate climate than other mainland colonies but still well north of the sweltering heat and humidity of the Caribbean, South Carolina appeared to the Proprietary Government and its other proponents as "a charmed space for agriculture" (Edelson 98). This charmed space extended to political concerns; the colony was an opportunity to replicate the best of English culture while avoiding poverty, class stratifications, and social unrest -- issues at home in England and just to the north in Virginia where a rebellious planter elite was undermining profits and expectations.<sup>39</sup> For its white colonists, South Carolina promised

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<sup>39</sup> Bacon's Rebellion took place in Virginia from 1676 to 1677. For a poetic retelling of Bacon's rebellion, see "The History of Colonel NATHANIEL BACON's Rebellion in VIRGINIA" in Ebenezer Cooke's *The Maryland Muse* (Annapolis: [William Parks], 1731). Leonard C. Wroth provides a facsimile version in *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 44 (1934), 311-26. For an overview of Bacon's

to be both healthful and plentiful, a place where profit and gentility could materialize and merge.<sup>40</sup>

Yet the colonists experienced difficulties when they attempted to realize that promise. In explaining why this occurred, S. Max Edelson's *Plantation Enterprise in Colonial South Carolina* emphasizes the unique environment of the colony.<sup>41</sup> South Carolina's extensive swamps resisted efforts by colonists to reproduce English farming practices and to introduce more exotic yet profitable commodities that the Lords Proprietors hoped would quickly pay back their investments. Colonists instead sought the scattered higher grounds to subsist on cattle-corn farming and exchanged the wheat-based diet of England for the corn-based dishes they adapted from their Indian neighbors.

Since elite settlers and colonial investors were loath to give up on the dream of South Carolina and settle for subsistence, they continued to hunt for mercantile commodities. With the introduction of rice in the 1690s, South Carolina began to show economic promise. Yet rice farming required an abandonment of "proper" English agricultural processes, such as planting in rows and avoiding swampland. Instead, white colonists cleared freshwater swampland, planted thick layers of seed, and increased the

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Rebellion, see Wilcomb E. Washburn's *The Governor and the Rebel: The Story of Bacon's Rebellion* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1957) or the introduction in *Samuel Wiseman's Book of Record: The Official Account of Bacon's Rebellion in Virginia, 1676-1677*, edited by Michael Leroy Oberg (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2005).

<sup>40</sup> I have used Carolina and South Carolina interchangeably in this paragraph. North Carolina's barrier islands restricted shipping to and from the economy, thus limiting its ability to create the massive plantation economies of its neighbors. Without rice and a port, North Carolina had a "more modest transatlantic trade," focusing on staples such as tar and lumber (Edelson 61). North Carolina separated from Carolina in 1712 when it received its first colonial governor.

<sup>41</sup> For a more general approach to South Carolina colonial history, see Robert M. Weir's *Colonial South Carolina: A History* (Millwood, New York: KTO Press, 1983). *Money, Trade, and Power: The Evolution of Colonial South Carolina's Plantation Society*, edited by Jack P. Greene, Rosemary Brana-Shute, and Randy J. Sparks, includes various historiographic essays about different aspects of colonial South Carolina (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001).

importation of slaves in order to support the labor-intensive agricultural system they were developing.<sup>42</sup>

The colony's economic transition from initial promise of exotic abundance to disappointing subsistence cattle-corn farming to renewed promise through farming adapted to the landscape and increased slave importation established South Carolina as a culture distinct from England and other British colonies, including those also dependent upon plantations and slaves. Eschewing the gentrification and "stiff formality" found in other plantation economies, South Carolinian planters "aspired to become a 'polite and commercial' people, more like Britain's rising class of traders, professionals, and new landowners than its landed aristocracy" (Edelson 9). The combination of these aspirations with the colony's vagaries of climate and land resulted in a cultural valuation of innovation and experimentation. Even after success with rice, South Carolinians, wishing to more effectively capitalize upon the landscape and gain season-to-season stability through diversification, continued crop experiments. The need for another staple commodity became especially important as rice profits decreased in the 1740s due to a tighter foreign market and increased freight costs (Stumpf 173).<sup>43</sup>

#### The emergence of a planter community and character in South Carolina

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<sup>42</sup> While the precise origins of rice cultivation in South Carolina are unknown, some of the slaves had certainly grown it before in Africa where it was a staple crop for some. Growing the crop for the first time, white planters "cobbled together the means to make it grow" (Edelson 77) through available land, labor, and farming technologies as well as the experience of slaves in growing rice for their provision grounds or in Africa.

<sup>43</sup> Shields' *Oracles of Empire* amply and persuasively demonstrates that the pragmatic, "dirty" world of commerce connects deeply to artistic productions. In terms of particularly Southern manifestations of this phenomenon, Shields asserts, "In the southern colonies particularly the fantasies of cornucopia gave way to a literature reflecting the staple system – a discourse pervaded with the theme of production and the mystique of the land" (17). In an analysis of George Ogilvie's georgic poem *Carolina; or, the Planter* (1774), Shields argues that, for Ogilvie, "the capacity to conceive and oversee the making of a plantation vitally expressed human creativity" (91).

influenced gender and race relations. While few studies explicitly discuss white women's labor in pre-rice South Carolina, white women must have participated in the hard labor of early frontier settlements.<sup>44</sup> Even after their labor moved out of the fields, white women's physical investment in carving homes out of the frontier continued to be acknowledged. G. Winston Lane, Jr.'s examination of four generations of Middleton women in South Carolina demonstrates the economic power and longevity of widowed and remarried women. In one striking example, Sarah Morton Milton "left an estate estimated at £50,000 sterling" when she died in 1765 at the age of eighty-two, still in control of her properties, a fact which "warranted note not only in the *South Carolina Gazette* but in the *Gentlemen's Magazine* of London as well" (Lane 328). Julia Cherry Spruill highlights the presence of independent women planters throughout the South and notes that "[i]t was customary for the widow to be made executor or administrator of her husband's estate and to be allowed the use during her life of one-third of his lands" (305). White women's ability to function visibly and productively as planters, personally placing advertisements in newspapers and going to court to complete administrative requirements, indicates that women's potential for agricultural competence was generally recognized.<sup>45</sup>

While South Carolinian gender roles for white women may have been somewhat fluid, racial divisions were stark, even when compared to other plantation economies.

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<sup>44</sup> The most focused discussion of white women's labor in the colonial South occurs in Julia Cherry Spruill's *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1938). However, this text does not discuss in detail women's daily work during the first years of the colony. Spruill does provide rich information about homes and their contents, the various "careers" a woman might have (tavern keeper, planter, shopkeeper, etc.), and women's work in the later years of South Carolina's colonial period.

<sup>45</sup> The *South Carolina Gazette* during the 1740s is rife with advertisements by women planters, indicating goods wanted or for sale, announcing missing livestock and slaves, executing wills, or selling property. These exist in almost every issue. Spruill's research unearthed white women planters' presence in early court and bureaucratic records. See Spruill, *Women's Life and Work in the Southern Colonies*.

The task labor system which emerged alongside rice as a crop worked differently than the gang labor systems of other plantation colonies and therefore exacerbated racial separation. In the task system, overseers gave slaves a certain job to perform each day at their own speed and punished those slaves who did not complete it. This system reduced the need for direct supervision in the dangerous and uncomfortable swamplands. It also allowed slave owners to reduce their responsibility for feeding their slaves, since slaves could use their time after task completion to work their own provision grounds. While slaves had been growing some of their own foodstuffs since their arrival in the seventeenth century, task labor systematized this method.<sup>46</sup>

Racial divisions exacerbated through the first decades of the 1700s due to both Indian Wars and slave rebellions. The Yamasee War, largely arising from white traders' mistreatment of the Yamasees, was "one of the bloodiest and most costly of the colonial Indian wars" (Weir 85).<sup>47</sup> Perhaps more significantly for an analysis of Lucas Pinckney is the Stono Rebellion of 1739, when approximately twenty black slaves led by Jemmy attacked a store in Stono, about "fifteen miles southwest of Charles Town" (Weir 193). They then marched ten miles, "encamped in a field, raised a banner, and began beating drums," drawing between sixty and 100 slaves to join them (Weir 193). About a week later, after several fights with the local militia, the uprising was quashed. Twenty whites

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<sup>46</sup> Some scholars find empowerment for slaves in the rice culture, because it is built upon their expertise, and the task labor system, because it allows for increased autonomy. However, Edelson argues that white elites quickly forgot the debt they owed to their slaves and that the task labor system instantiated a distinct separation of races (88). After the "rough equality of material conditions shared by settlers and slaves in the seventeenth century," whites other than indentured servants largely withdrew from hands-on agricultural production (Edelson 88).

<sup>47</sup> For a discussion of the Yamasee War, race, and slavery, see Chapter 12: "The Yamasee War" in Alan Galloway's *The Indian Slave Trade: The Rise of the English Empire in the American South 1670-1717* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), 315-44.

and many more blacks died in the rebellion. As a result, the importation of new slaves was prohibited through the 1740s (partially out of fear of recalcitrance and partially out of fear over the increasing population imbalance). South Carolina also instituted a slave code which prohibited such actions as slave gatherings and education.

Thus, Eliza Lucas Pinckney wrote her mercantilist letters within a quite particular colonial space. First, it had an unpredictable climate and a challenging landscape. Second, there were stark and isolating racial divisions. Third, it was financially valuable to the British Empire almost entirely due to one commodity, rice. Fourth, its distance from London meant that there was a loosening of gender roles.<sup>48</sup> In short, it was a particular colonial space that was ripe for a vision of communal intimacy which connected to the twin local masteries of landscape and race.

*A "fertile brain at schemeing": Eliza Lucas Pinckney as Planter and Author*

Lucas Pinckney (1722?-1793) was born as Eliza Lucas in the West Indies to English parents, George and Ann Lucas.<sup>49</sup> After a childhood in the islands, Lucas Pinckney studied in England for several years, spent a brief time in Antigua, and finally moved to South Carolina at the age of fifteen. Her father owned three plantations near Charleston, and the Lucas family settled at Wappoo, a plantation that "overlooked

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<sup>48</sup> For a more explicit analysis of how colonial South Carolina loosened gender roles and how white women responded, see Cara Anzilotti's "Autonomy and the Female Planter in Colonial South Carolina" (*Journal of Southern History* 63.2 (1997): 239-68). She claims that while cultural dependence upon wives and widows created an opportunity for undermining patriarchy, female planters instead "shored up the patriarchal structure and thus helped their families remain wealthy and powerful" (240).

<sup>49</sup> The main source for biographical information is Elise Pinckney's "Eliza Lucas Pinckney: Biographical Sketch" in *The Letterbook of Eliza Lucas Pinckney 1739-1762* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997). Also see Harriott Horry Ravenel's *Eliza Pinckney* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1896).

Wappoo Creek, seventeen miles by land and six by water from Charleston" (E. Pinckney xv-xvi). In 1739, when Lucas Pinckney was seventeen, her father was called back to Antigua in a military capacity due to escalating hostilities between Spain and England. Lucas Pinckney was left behind with her mother and her sister, and placed in charge of the three plantations, their agricultural production, and the family's slaves.<sup>50</sup>

At her father's encouragement, Lucas Pinckney experimented with indigo. Indigo produces a particularly vibrant blue dye and has a much higher yield than woad, the plant used for blue dye in England. The French Indies were the main source of indigo during this period.<sup>51</sup> She finally produced a marketable grade in 1744 and helped to pioneer South Carolina's brief but profitable indigo economy when she distributed seed to her neighbors. As her descendant and editor Elise Pinckney eloquently notes, "Indigo culture spread quickly, for the gold-leaved plant pointed the path to plantation affluence" (xix). In that same year, Lucas Pinckney married her long time friend Charles Pinckney, who had been widowed six months. Lucas Pinckney had four children with Charles, three of whom survived to adulthood, and split her time between their Charleston townhouse and their Belmont plantation. In 1752, they left for London after the Crown precipitately replaced Pinckney as Chief Justice for the colony with a colonial outsider.<sup>52</sup> The

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<sup>50</sup> Lucas Pinckney's mother, Ann Lucas, is a seldom-mentioned figure in both the letterbook and in secondary material. One assumes that Lucas's poor health accounts for the fact that her daughter was left in charge when her husband returned to the Caribbean, but that is only supposition. Ravenel was related to Lucas Pinckney and is the biographer most likely to have apocryphal knowledge about Lucas. She also attributes Lucas Pinckney's control of the plantations to the mother's "bad health," but does not identify her source (2).

<sup>51</sup> Because South Carolina indigo could both compete with an English crop (woad) and reduce dependence upon a French commodity, this agricultural choice seems simultaneously belligerent and patriotic.

<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, during his brief stint as Chief Justice, Charles Pinckney attended meetings of the South Carolina Council which discussed a potential trip on behalf of South Carolina by Coosaponakeesa as agent and interpreter to the Creeks in 1752. Despite the Governor's recommendation, the Council would not

Pinckneys returned to Carolina with their daughter in 1758, leaving their sons temporarily behind in England. Charles Pinckney contracted malaria soon after their return and died that same year. Lucas Pinckney took up the reins at Belmont and, after initial difficulties, revived the flagging Pinckney plantation as well as their other properties. She died in 1793 after seeing her sons rise to prominence during the Revolutionary War and in its aftermath.

Similar to Georgian historians' treatment of Coosaponakeesa, the South's and South Carolina's historical scholars frequently turn to Eliza Lucas Pinckney as a historiographic source. As an architect of South Carolina's profitable indigo economy, the daughter of a West Indies colonial military leader, the wife of a South Carolinian government official, and the mother of Southern revolutionary leaders, she can claim a prominent place in many British North American historical discussions. Her personal letterbook, encompassing the years 1739 to 1762, has been the frequent primary source for discussions of Lucas Pinckney. She also leaves behind several archival letters, housed at Duke University, and a 1756 recipe book which was published in the 1900s. Harriott Horry Ravenel's 1896 biography of Lucas Pinckney also reprints several letters that are not included in the letterbook.

In terms of literary studies, most scholars dismiss her writings as unworthy of analysis or focus on her repetition and incorporation of intellectual ideas from male

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authorize her to act as agent and only allowed her to join the delegation when their only other volunteer, Thomas Bosomworth, refused to go without his wife acting as his interpreter. In light of Pinckney's wife's unabashed intelligence and active participation in South Carolina's economy, one wonders if Pinckney was less disbelieving than other Council members about Coosaponakeesa's ability to act as an agent on their behalf.



authors such as John Locke and Joseph Addison.<sup>53</sup> Other scholars implicitly or explicitly argue for Lucas Pinckney's unsuccessful challenge to patriarchy and her confirmation of white feminine norms. For example, Emily Bowles argues that Lucas Pinckney's writings display an "ideal of Southern womanhood" which hints at but does not achieve subversion of her culture's patriarchal values: "Pinckney offers her unique achievements and interests to her women readers, [. . .] but crucially returns to dominant paradigms, always mediating her acts of resistance, self-production, and independence through rubrics of modesty, submission, and patriarchalism" (37). According to Bowles, Lucas Pinckney "writes herself" into Southern history and culture, in many ways therefore domesticating her scientific achievements and extending her private presence into the public (38). In another example, Catherine Kerrison analyzes a letter in which Lucas Pinckney opines on Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*. She places Lucas Pinckney within a larger tradition of white Southern women writers and productively considers how these women carved out and expanded their sphere of influence and power. Both scholars importantly recuperate Lucas Pinckney as an author. Yet, because they treat her letters as familiar, even when they deal with business matters, and because they do not sufficiently take into account epistolary conventions of modesty and wit, they fail to appreciate Lucas Pinckney's participation in an economic community through her experimentation and her writing. Susan Scott Parrish's *American Curiosity* is rare exception, and she stresses that Lucas Pinckney "actively participated in the transatlantic plantation economy and its

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<sup>53</sup> For example, see David R. Chesnut's "Eliza Lucas Pinckney" in *Southern Writers: A Biographical Dictionary*, edited by Robert Bain, Joseph M. Flora, and Louis D. Rubin, Jr. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1979), 354-5. The main indicator of the scholarly under-appreciation for Lucas Pinckney is the lack of critical analyses of her writing.

commodification of nature (and people)" (*American Curiosity: Cultures of Natural History in the Colonial British Atlantic World* 201). Yet because her project is concerned with placing Lucas Pinckney within a transatlantic context, she spends the bulk of her analysis on Lucas Pinckney's complicated revision of the exotic colonial pastoral and does not deeply consider how her writings and her commitment to her region's economic health influence more local understandings of community.

In order to recover the commercialism of Lucas Pinckney's botanical pursuits, I specifically focus upon those moments in her letters which discuss her scientific and economic work with indigo. These moments, appearing between 1739 and 1744, have the added benefit of overlapping most closely with Coosaponakeesa's writing. All of these letters are written to her father and therefore necessarily include moments of intimacy alongside moments of business. Those juxtapositions will figure in my analysis. Indeed, I would like to suggest that the confluence of business and intimacy within these letters only heightens her ability to produce a new understanding of public intimacy that parallels pre-existing private intimacy i.e. filial love.

#### *Hopes of Indigo: Agricultural Experimentation and Labor in Lucas Pinckney's Letters*

Lucas Pinckney first refers to indigo in a note that she entered into her letterbook around July 1740: "Wrote my Father a very long letter on his plantation affairs and on his change of commissions with Major Heron; On the Augustine Expedition; On the pains I had taken to bring the Indigo, Ginger, Cotton and Lucerne and Casada to perfection, and had greater hopes from the Indigo (if I could have the seed earlier next

year from the West India's) than any of the rest of the things I had tryd" (8). This memorandum brings together business, agriculture, and military concerns. In retrospect, it also foreshadows her future success with indigo; she is right to have "greater hopes from the Indigo." At the same time, the note only obliquely references more intimate subjects such as the potential for her father's return to South Carolina via an exchange of commissions with Alexander Heron.

While these themes -- topics of empire and colonial administration, the importance of early planting to indigo's success, erratic expressions of filial intimacy -- arise intermittently throughout the 1739-46 section of her letterbook, my analysis centers on the phrase "the pains I had taken." In referring to her experiments with various potential plantation commodities, the confluence of "pains" and "I" in this phrase suggests that her experiments are simultaneously labor-intensive and entirely her own. Indigo cultivation was indeed labor-intensive. The species of indigo with which Lucas Pinckney experimented was *Indigofera tinctoria*, a native of India and Africa and the type grown in the West Indies where the French had developed it as a profitable crop.<sup>54</sup> A 1747 British pamphlet explains that its cultivation requires land that is "as clean as possible from Weeds," has been "well ploughed, and harrowed, to break the Clods, and make it fine, before the Seed is sown" (*Further Observations* 15). To plant the seeds, one "make[s] Drills about half an Inch deep, either with a Hoe or a drill Plow, at about a Foot and a half distance from each other, and scatter[s] the Seeds thin in the Drills, then

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<sup>54</sup> According Pettit in *America's Indigo Blues: Resist-Printed and Dyed Textiles of the Eighteenth-Century*, *I. tinctoria* "was a rather slender plant with a single, brittle stem, the color of which was shaded from gray at the base through green to reddish at the tip. The smooth oval leaves grew from short, spreading stems ranged around the main stem in pairs. Small, pale yellowish-pink blossoms grew in clusters, and when matured they were followed by bean-like pods that held extremely small, dark seeds" (26).

draw[s] the Earth over the Seeds, so as to bury them about half an Inch deep" (*Further Observations* 16). During the two month or so growing period, the planter keeps the indigo moist and the ground free of weeds. When mature, the plant is cut at the base of the stalk near the ground. A second crop grows in another six or seven weeks.<sup>55</sup> In experimenting with indigo, Lucas Pinckney would have striven for a crop sufficiently large enough to determine an ideal method of cultivation in South Carolina, to yield seed, and to produce a large enough quantity for processing, thereby verifying the quality of the plants. A later letter reveals that one of her earliest crops disappointingly produced only about "a hundred bushels" (or approximately 800 gallons), a result indicating that she was working with substantial quantities (16).

Lucas Pinckney's solitary performance of this physically demanding and extended agricultural process is unimaginable, especially since she had an alternate source of labor at hand: slaves. Therefore, her usage of the word "I" appropriates the "pains" of her slaves. Rhetorically, she erases the distance between herself and her slaves so much so that they and their labor are rhetorically subsumed. Black men and women are for her physical resources that seemingly require less mention than seeds. On the other hand, this same usage of the word "I" marks her presence into the world of "plantation affairs." In effect, by omitting mention of slaves' labor and claiming their pains as her own, she writes herself into the realm of mercantile trade through the topics of indigo and other commodity experimentation. Moreover, she intensifies her connection to the South Carolinian landscape. It is she who appears to get her hands "dirty" and who harvests the

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<sup>55</sup> Pettit's provides a thorough overview of indigo cultivation and preparation. See particularly Chapter III: "Indigo, its Cultivation and Processing" and Chapter IV: "Indigo: its Cultivation in America."

income upon which her family and her plantation depend..

She continues this declaration of personal involvement in trade and land the following year in another letter to her father, perhaps misdated June 4, 1741.<sup>56</sup> Unlike the letterbook entry analyzed above, this entry is a transcription, a fact which justifies a more intense analysis since she apparently valued her word choice. The letter calls for her father's hope and patience:

I wrote you in [a] former letter we had a fine Crop of Indigo Seed upon the ground, and since informed you the frost took it before it was dry. I picked out the best of it and had it planted, but there is not more than a hundred bushels of it come up -- which proves the more unluckey as you have sent a man to make it. I make no doubt Indigo will prove a very valuable Commodity in time if we could have the seed from the west Indias [in] time enough to plant the latter end of March, that the seed might be dry enough to gather before our frost. I am sorry we lost this season. We can do nothing towards it now but make the works ready for next year. (16)

She laments the fact that South Carolina's frost has ruined what seemed to be a promising indigo crop, thereby obviating a need for the expert in indigo processing that her father has sent, probably at some expense, to South Carolina. Looking towards next season, she wants her father to send seed from the West Indies earlier so she can plant and harvest earlier.

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<sup>56</sup> I say "misdated" because it seems odd to have written about frosts affecting this season in June, though she may have been referring to a late frost.

Her employment of "I" in this entry less clearly subsumes slave labor since she may have in fact personally "picked out" the best of the viable seed. Moreover, when she writes about the crop "we had on the ground," she may be including the slaves even as the phrase appears to reference the plantation more generally. However, the unwritten "by slaves" after "had it planted" and "to gather" again depersonalizes this aspect of the labor. Moreover, in mentioning the man her father has sent to "make it," she again misrepresents the labor requirement since indigo processing often involved workers who "bodily entered the vats [in which indigo was steeping] and began flailing the warm liquid" with sticks and their limbs (Pettit 35).<sup>57</sup> This vigorous beating would precipitate particles of indigo. After it had settled, the resultant indigo mud or *bouille* (pulp) was then treated further through activities such as boiling, scraping, drying, forming into cakes, and packaging for overseas shipment (Pettit 36). Even though the failure of Lucas Pinckney's crop means processing labor will not be required after all, slaves will still need to "make the works ready for next year."

Though slaves and their labor are an undercurrent to this passage, the palpable absence of any direct reference to their work replicates the ways in which they became increasingly invisible through South Carolina's task labor system even as their labor was the foundation of the agricultural economy. In modeling that absence in her entries, Lucas Pinckney textually aligns herself with the entrepreneurial planter elite. However, in more fully claiming a presence in and impact upon the mercantile economy, Lucas

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<sup>57</sup> Some West Indies plantations used mechanical paddle wheels "turned by hand or by horse or steam power" to mix oxygen with the steeped indigo (Pettit 36), but these methods may not have emerged until after Lucas Pinckney's experiments and would have likely required a more substantial capital investment than her father was willing to provide in these early stages.

Pinckney's letter not only marks the plantation's products as white, but also as hers.

An extended analysis of pronouns in this passage demonstrates how her entry imagines her personal presence even as it disassociates her father from the indigo cultivation. While to some readers her inclusions of "we" and "our" are often simply confluences of "I" (Lucas Pinckney) and "you" (her father), I believe such moments instead mark her as an independent and knowledgeable planter aligned with her fellow South Carolinians. My intent is not to argue so much that she excludes her father from the family's plantations, but more to demonstrate how she asserts herself and thus facilitates the creation of a local economic community intimately united in its financial concerns *and* its mastery of the landscape.

In the first sentence, she reminds her father that she has already informed him that "we had a fine Crop of Indigo Seed upon the ground" that was ruined by the frost. The fact that she must inform and remind him of these facts distances him temporally and geographically from these events, and highlights her more active involvement and immediate presence. She underscores these facts in the second sentence when she writes, "I picked out the best of it" (my emphasis). Her switch to the second person at the end of the sentence -- "you have sent a man to make it" -- further emphasizes her father's distance from South Carolina and, by extension, the work of the plantation and indigo experimentation. He does not have complete, current knowledge about the situation and therefore acts imperfectly. She then returns to the first person and reassures her father by writing, "I make no doubt Indigo will prove a very valuable Commodity in time if we could have the seed from the west Indias [in] time." This statement confidently asks her

father to depend upon her agrarian and fiscal shrewdness. The reappearance of "we" in this line now indicates that the first person plural does not, in fact, include her father since he is not the recipient of the seed; he is the sender of the seed.

The pinnacle of this passage occurs when she reasons at the end of the above sentence that earlier seed would permit a harvest "before our frost." Since her father has already been separated geographically, temporally, and knowledgeably, Lucas Pinckney's "our frost" in effect detaches her father from and personalizes the image of Indigo production to her colonial home. These words make her home seem less a temporary abode in the colonies, where she is awaiting her future or at least her father's return, and more a place to which she connects. As my discussion of South Carolina's early history showed, non-inhabitants of South Carolina (like her father) repeatedly miscalculated the variability of its climate which included unexpected droughts, rainy periods, and frosts.

Due to her continued residence, Lucas Pinckney is the proper caretaker of the land and she is actively involved in expanding its place and importance within the mercantile economy. If "our" excludes her father, an implied antecedent of the word is South Carolina's resident colonists. In this moment, she suggests personal intimacy with the white South Carolinian planters around her and places herself in a mercantilist community tied together by the specifics of the region and their desire for a prosperous commodity. While this "our" may also obliquely include slaves, their rhetorical erasure in other moments makes their possible inclusion subordinate to the dominance of the planter elite who own the agricultural products, direct the work, and understand the environment. Her final two sentences now seem protective of her work and her



community because they shift focus away from the season's loss and towards future work and expected success. While "we" may now re-include her father, that inclusion is more placatory than conspiratory.

Further mentions of indigo build upon her autonomous and competent plantationite persona. For example, on March 11, 1741[2], Lucas Pinckney entered a memorandum into her letterbook. At the entry's beginning, she briefly notes, "Wrote a long letter to my father about the Indigo and all the plantation affairs, and that Mr. H. B. [Hugh Bryan] has been very much deluded by his own fancys and imagined he was assisted by the divine spirit to prophesey" (30). The remainder of the memorandum appears to be a transcription of what she wrote to her father about Hugh Bryan. Bryan believed in an imminent apocalypse that would lead to Charleston's destruction and to freedom for enslaved persons. Some Carolinians thought he was urging an uprising, though Lucas Pinckney believes her fellow whites more "dreaded the consiquence of such a thing being put in to the head of the slaves and the advantage they might take of us" (30). Bryan repeatedly warned local inhabitants about the impending apocalypse and, after making them uneasy, went to live in the woods as a prophet, wrote down his visions, and finally admitted his error after he was unable to "divide the water" and both he and the area survived past the time of the foretold destruction (E. L. Pinckney 30). Lucas Pinckney describes his reaction by noting, "[U]pon finding both fail -- the water continued as it was, and himself a living Instance of the falicy of his own predictions -- was convinced he was not guided by the infalible spirrit but that of delusion" (30). She concludes by indicating she has enclosed a copy of an apologetic public letter Bryan

wrote after these events.

Through this memorandum, Lucas Pinckney juxtaposes the topics of indigo experimentation, self-delusion, and racial anxiety. This juxtaposition may express a worry -- conscious or unconscious -- that a quest for profitable indigo cultivation in South Carolina is also self-delusion. She began her research in 1739 or, more probably, 1740 and did not produce a marketable grade until 1744. In the face of her failures, she repeatedly claims in other letters that next year will be better if only she gets enough seeds or she is able to plant earlier. I imagine her identity as a young, unmarried woman would contribute to self-doubt. Yet, like Bryan in the wilderness, Lucas Pinckney perseveres, insists upon faith, and does not express open doubt about her pending success in any of her letters.

Lucas Pinckney does not discuss the source of her confidence even while she describes what she believes to be Bryan's ridiculous behavior. Yet further knowledge about Bryan reveals a striking difference between their visions for South Carolina. Bryan's dreams center upon a belief in a slave uprising. According to Leigh Eric Schmidt, Bryan, a wealthy white planter, converted to evangelical Christianity during George Whitefield's tour of the region in 1740. In 1741, Bryan extended his evangelism to the slave community and "revealed his deep concern for the enslaved" (Schmidt 241). Interestingly, his sympathy for this population ostensibly arose in part due to his own enslavement by Indians during the Yamasee War in 1715 (Schmidt 241). No matter the impetus or truthfulness behind his visions, his prophecies threatened the power structure because they pointed to and perhaps increased the potential for a violent end to racial

divisions, the same divisions upon which the elite community's economy and identity rest and which had already been threatened by the Stono Rebellion only a few years before. Unlike Bryan, Lucas Pinckney's agricultural experiments and her vision of profit deepened the region's dependence upon slavery. They would provide an additional source of revenue which is highly reliant upon the physical labor of slaves. In short, she "gets it," and Bryan does not.

This distinction between Lucas Pinckney and Bryan supports continued confidence in her experiments, as does her closing comment. She writes, "Shall send by Capt. Gregory, if it can be got ready in time for him, the Turpentine and neats foot oil" (31). This sentence transitions to business matters. Turpentine, another product of mercantile trade in the Carolinas, and neat's-foot oil, a tanning oil made from cattle hooves, are manufacturing materials. This note recenters Lucas Pinckney's writing in the realm of trade.

Other letterbook entries help confirm this reading. As already noted, some entries, through their erasure of the black presence, repress instead of expose racial divisions. Additionally, Lucas Pinckney characterizes her relation to the land as her source of rationality. Whereas she views Bryan as "a warning to all pious minds not to reject reason and revelation and set up in their stead their own wild notions" (29), a previous letter from around the same period indicates that being on the plantation puts her in her "right Sences" (19). In mid-1741, Lucas Pinckney returned to Wappoo after a trip to Charleston which included a visit to the Pinckneys. In a letter to Elizabeth Lamb Pinckney, Charles's first wife, she wonders why "everything appeared gloomy and

lonesome" upon her return (19).<sup>58</sup> She informs Lamb Pinckney about her approach to determining a cause:

I began to consider what alteration there was in this place that used so agreeably to sooth my (for some time past) pensive humour, and made me indifferent to every thing the gay world could boast; but found the change not in the place but in my self, and it doubtless proceeded from that giddy gayety and want of reflection which I contracted when in town; and I was forced to consult Mr. Lock over and over to see wherein personal Identity consisted and if I was the very same self. [. . .] I recon it will take me five months reading before I have done with him. (19)

Her concluding paragraph reassures Lamb Pinckney that she has "now returned to [her] former Gravity and love of solitude" and that she is in her "right Sences," despite the fact that "'tis become so much the fashion to say every body that is grave is religiously mad" (19). Much of this letter speaks to the requirements of politeness. It flatters the reader by indicating that the visit to her home was pleasant and that her host's company is missed. Her reference to John Locke, most likely his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, indicates she has been reading an author recommended by Lamb Pinckney's husband. At the same time, her letter deftly postpones another visit to Charleston by indicating the length of time she will need to finish her reading. This letter demonstrates Lucas Pinckney's clear sense that her identity connects to place and that she has some control of that identity through textual engagement. The latter point is apparent in both her use of

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<sup>58</sup> Elizabeth Lamb Pinckney was the first wife of Lucas Pinckney's husband. Elizabeth Lamb Pinckney died in January 1744. Eliza Lucas married Charles Pinckney in May 1744.

Locke to "see wherein personal Identity consisted" and her manipulation of epistolary conventions to construct two simultaneous personas. These personas are epistolary (being witty and artful) and plantationite (being grave and capable).<sup>59</sup> Just as her knowledge of the region, its land, its climate, and indigo itself justifies her authoritative authorial demeanor and her commitment to a local economic community, her readers' epistolary knowledge of that demeanor justifies faith in Lucas Pinckney's endeavors even in light of the, to her, ridiculous self-delusion of other planters like Bryan.

While the majority of Lucas Pinckney's references to indigo occur in these mercantilist letters to her father in which she reports on her work as his representative, one other mention of indigo extends the elite, white, South Carolinian community that she imagines through writing about indigo and land. In a letter she wrote to Elizabeth Lamb Pinckney's ward, Miss Bartlett, probably in 1742, Lucas Pinckney writes:

Dear Miss B.

As my poetic vein comes by fitts and those short and seldom, I must desend to dull prose to tell you I am much obliged for your poetical compliment. The lines are very pretty, tho' you take the poets licence to raise your heroine much above her deserts. If this is your first attempt you will certainly be an excellent poettress in time, but let a friend advise you to chuse a subject for the future more worthy of your muse than a penejerick on

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<sup>59</sup> Her usage of the word "Gravity" hints at the rational process of experimentation through which she will continue to construct her plantationite identity. "Gravity" obliquely alludes to a foundational Enlightenment text, Isaac Newton's *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687), a text which encouraged scientific exploration and progress as a core value for Enlightened Britons.

Yr humble Servt.

E. Lucas

Mama begs Mrs. Pinckneys acceptance of a little Indigo Seed, Sorrel, and negroe pepper -- the last a good Ingredient in dressing Turtle. (28)

The main portion of this letter is Lucas Pinckney's customary response to the receipt of a poem in praise of herself. She performs a routine epistolary task when she writes she has "desend[ed] to dull prose." However, the postscript to this letter documents the transmission of agricultural knowledge through elite women's letters. Couched as a favor to her mother, who until now has been absent from Lucas Pinckney's references to indigo and only rarely mentioned in other letters, she includes indigo seed with the letter.

Though Lucas Pinckney would later send indigo seeds from her first large crop to the area's planters, a crucial act in establishing indigo as a regional commodity, this moment early in her efforts implicates her closest white women friends in her experiments. Moreover, in advising them to "dress[. . .] Turtle" with "negroe pepper,"<sup>60</sup> the letter subtly insists upon the locality and intimacy of the economic community where women who are friends and neighbors counsel each other about the dinner table, capitalize upon their slaves' cleverness with plants, and work in tandem to promote their local region's crop diversity.

When Lucas Pinckney finally produced a successful crop in 1744, she wrote her father a jubilant letter in which she gives details and tells him that some has been sent to England "to try how t'is aproved of there" (Ravenel 105). After expressing her hopes for

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<sup>60</sup> According to the *OED*, "negro pepper" is a synonym for guinea pepper, an early name for cayenne pepper.

a bounty, she continues to dream of the future:

We please ourselves with the prospect of exporting in a few years a good quantity [of indigo] from hence, and supplying our Mother Country with a manufacture for w<sup>ch</sup> she has so great a demand, and which she is now supplyd with from the French Collonys, and many thousand pounds per annum thereby lost to the nation, when she might as well be supplyd here, if the matter was applyd to in earnest. (105)

This letter, written only months after marrying Charles, suggests that she is still "far gone in romance" with indigo. It speaks to her commitment to the vibrancy of local and imperial trade. Though a new, young wife, her exuberance for agriculture persists. As an elite woman, her success with indigo continues to authorize her interventions into and visions for the economic foundations of empire.

- **Conclusion**

Through their actions, Coosaponakeesa and Lucas Pinckney vibrantly added to their local economies. As components of their interventions, their texts instantiate their visions of community and intimacy even as they archive their authority. Through my analysis of their writings, I have focused on the particulars of their involvements. At the same time, my study has exposed that the requirements of politics and economies during this period could act as opportunities for women to express their autonomy. Through their mercantilist letters, these women use paper and pen to negotiate the boundaries and definitions of their communities, helping enact the intimate visions of landscape that their

slippery tongues can voice, but not imprint.

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For both Coosaponakeesa and Eliza Lucas Pinckney, proximity and presence precede intimacy. Their approach to intimacy is one that treats it as quite artificial and malleable, as well as vulnerable to the effects of language. In crafting semi-public communities based around local economic concerns, Coosaponakeesa and Lucas Pinckney crucially underscore that trade, even within an imperial framework, is a matter of interpersonal relationships. By inflecting trade with intimacy, these women ground it within their particular landscapes and cultures, a method that privileges their expertise over others'. Their communal visions have as much to do with those it excludes as with those it includes.

In contrast, the next chapter will deal with a much less artful use of intimate language. Sarah Osborn's story exemplifies that the language of personal intimacy often connects closely to individuals' identities. Thus, its employment has the potential to adjust women authors' understandings of themselves just as it changes their relationships to others and deploys their communal views.



## CHAPTER TWO

### Nursing Piety in Newport:

#### White and Black Mothers in Sarah Osborn's Spiritual Diary

On Friday, December 4, 1761, Sarah Haggard Wheaton Osborn awoke in her Newport, Rhode Island home. She waited for her husband to rise while "it [was] yet dark" and drew the "curtains" around her bed, leaving "Just" enough space "to Let in the Light" (Norton 527).<sup>1</sup> Then, enclosed within her makeshift prayer closet and safe from interruptions, she turned onto her "knees [and] stomach." "[S]upported with bolster and Pillows," she engaged in religious "read[ing] and writ[ing]" for an hour or two. This particular morning, however, was somewhat unusual. Instead of reflecting on a Bible verse, a recent sermon, or her sinfulness and prospects for salvation, as was her usual wont, she was captivated by an incident from the preceding day's meeting of her women's prayer group. She records:

a Pleasant afternoon with dear friends of the society god assisted in Prayer  
and all was well till I askt the opinion of Phillis about our selling of bobey  
which contrary to my expectation vext her I realy expected as we Have not

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<sup>1</sup> My narration of her morning activities comes from a 1767 to Joseph Fish in which she describes the daily routine she has followed for at least twelve years. I quote from the transcription published by Mary Beth Norton. See "'My Resting Reaping Times': Sarah Osborn's Defense of Her 'Unfeminine' Activities, 1767" in *Signs* 2.2 (1976): 515-29.

business for Him and He must be Let out from Place to Place and run the risque of being made unsteady or quite spoilt or of going to sea [w]ould have rather chosen to Have Him settled under a steady Master whom He Loves where He Has Liv'd more then seven years the whole family fond of him & He of them where he has and will Enjoy the Priviledges of god's House the worship of God in the family instructions for his Soul and all the com[f]orts of this Life Necessary for Him but it was quite otherwise her reason seems at Present to be Laid aside and a fondness to take Place or rather anger the Lord calm Her spirits and compose Her mind I am now griev'd I mention it this week Lest it should unfit her for Preparations for the Lords table o God appear for us both I Pray thee and overrule in this affair as shall be most for thy own glory and the good of us all and Let my and her He[ar]ts be fixt on god and Eternal things[.] (Diary 1761-2 190-2)

This entry describes an incident between herself and Phillis. Phillis was an enslaved black woman owned by Timothy Allen, a Newport blacksmith, and probably the only black member of her female society.<sup>2</sup> Bobey, Phillis's son, was owned by Osborn. In front of everyone, Osborn has revealed the impending sale of Phillis's seventeen year old son, Bobey. Osborn rationalizes that, since they do not have enough work for Bobey to do, they either need to hire him out around Newport and the local region or sell him to someone else who can retain him as a steady member of his or her household. In fact, she and her husband have already loaned him to someone else for the last seven years.

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<sup>2</sup> For documentation about Phillis's ownership, see Catherine A. Brekus's *Sarah Osborn's World: The Rise of Evangelicalism in America* (forthcoming from Knopf).

The matter has now come to a head, perhaps because his informal master has asked to purchase Bobey, he is older and therefore worth more, or there has been a recent crisis in the family's already meager finances. Osborn prefers to sell Bobey instead of loaning him since, if he is sold, he "will Enjoy the Priviledges of god's House the worship of God in the family instructions for his Soul and all the com[f]orts of this Life Necessary for Him." Conversely, if he is loaned out, he may become "unsteady" or "spoilt" or even run off "to sea." Her presentation of the situation implies that she is acting benevolently and virtuously.

Phillis, however, rejects this implication and shocks Osborn with her response. Instead of being relieved that Osborn has found a solution to the financial burden that Bobey is to the household and has chosen to sell him, she is "vext." She likely believes she will never see her son again once she no longer personally knows and resides near his owner. For Phillis, Osborn's confidence in Bobey's religious life appears to be cold comfort in the face of his impending loss. In Osborn's eyes, Phillis's "fondness" has overcome her "reason," a critique that suggests that Phillis is inappropriately emotional. Concerned, she prays on Phillis's behalf.

The next morning, Osborn again awakens and follows her morning routine. She again waits for her husband to rise and draws the curtains close. By this time, though, the seeming confidence with which she concluded the preceding day's entry has been shaken. No longer able to calmly puzzle over Phillis's lack of "reason" and resign the conflict to God, she instead feels the first pangs of what will become an agonizing spiritual crisis. Alone with her pen in her closet, she confesses that she cannot "Leave thinking of this

affair" (Diary 1761-2 192). She then laments, "[A]ll this Morning is gone and I cant get nigh [to God] in any wise" (Diary 1761-2 193). She worries that she is unprepared for taking communion the next day because she has "a roveing Heart cold affections worldly thots" (Diary 1761-2 193). Her mind consumed by the conflict, she strives to approach God but instead experiences a sense of distance that resembles the same rift with which she has threatened Phillis and Bobey.

What follows is the the story of Osborn's spiritual crisis and the role that familial relationships, especially motherhood, play in its inception and resolution. First, I provide background about Osborn's life and writings. Then, I discuss what I believe are the origins of the crisis and follow with an analysis of how the origins suggest and relate to the actual resolution. Finally, I turn to the decades-long aftermath of the crisis and its scholarly implications. By examining the nine diary entries relating to the crisis alongside her other texts that she wrote as part of her active and intense spiritual life, I intend to trace a history wherein affect structures and unexpectedly transforms personal identity and community. Thus, this chapter in many ways counterpoints the others in this dissertation, which detail women's purposeful use of affect, not the ways that doing so are an inherently risky practice.

## **Background**

*"breathing my soul out": Sarah Haggar Wheaten Osborn's Life and Writing*

Sarah Haggar Wheaten Osborn was born Sarah Haggar in England in 1714 to

Benjamin and Susanna Guyse Haggar.<sup>3</sup> When she was seven or eight, her father left for the American colonies, and she went to boarding school near London. A year later, her father sent for her and her mother. The family lived first in Boston, then briefly in Freetown and Dighton, and finally settled in Newport, Rhode Island, when she was thirteen. Newport was her home for the remainder of her life. Against the wishes of her parents and when only seventeen, she married the sailor, Samuel Wheaten. Wheaten died in 1733, on his second voyage after their marriage, and left her a poor widow with an infant son, named Samuel after his father.

Finding a stable livelihood for herself and her son was a matter of trial and error. Osborn lived briefly with her brother, unsuccessfully took over another woman's school, and managed a shop. Then, a decade after her first husband's death, she remarried, this time to Henry Osborn, a widower with three sons. When they married this decision appeared to promise her some measure of economic security. However several months later Henry Osborn became ill and was never able to work again. In response, she opened another school in 1744. Though it was never lucrative and the Osborn family remained impoverished, it was successful enough to continue, and by 1758, the school was operating within her home and was quite large, with seventy students, male and female, black and white, rich and poor, locals and boarders, an unusual mix for a colonial era school. The curriculum included reading, writing, religion, and needlework.<sup>4</sup>

Due to the school's size and location in her home, Osborn depended upon a

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<sup>3</sup> For (auto)biographies of Osborn, see Osborn, *Memoirs* (5-83) and Kujawa, "A precious season."

<sup>4</sup> For a discussion of Osborn's work as an instructor, especially of needlework, see Betty Ring's *Let Virtue be a Guide to Thee: Needlework in the Education of Rhode Island Women, 1730-1830* (Providence: Rhode Island Historical Society, 1983), 46-50.

variety of help, including domestic servants and paid help. In the case of poor children, she sometimes schooled them for free and asked their families to assist in her domestic work. Neighbors, family, and friends helped out with domestic tasks and with the school in times of emergency or illness. One of those who helped may have been Phillis, either out of her own desire or at the behest of her owner. Phillis's son Bobey, however, did not assist Osborn with either her domestic or school duties. In 1754, when he was ten, Osborn arranged for him to live and work with her first husband's brother who lived in Berkley, Massachusetts.<sup>5</sup> Before sending him to the Wheaten household, she offered Bobey to Joseph Fish, a Congregationalist minister in Stonington, Connecticut whose daughters had attended her school and with whom she often corresponded, usually about spiritual matters. Her letter (less polished than others with its margin notes, insertions, and even a postscript asking Fish to "excuse [her] odd Patcht up Letter tis shatter'd to Pieces much Like its author") indicates that she would like to loan Bobey out for a variety of reasons. First, as she has insufficient work for him, she worries that "Idleness" and local "bad Examples" will lead him astray and that he will not "Learn to Labour" (Letter May 1754). Second, the "country air" might make him more "Hardy." Third, another master might cure him of "some freedoms" that he uses with her. Bobey is so free because, she believes, he has been "brought up with [her and Henry Osborn] as [their] own from the cradle." She strives to persuade Fish by enumerating his skills (he can "read" and "mend his own Cloaths") and his good character ("he is not adicted Either

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<sup>5</sup> I infer that Bobey was sent to her former brother-in-law based upon a letter to Joseph Fish in which she tells him she plans to do so since Fish, her first choice, likely has no need of Bobey. See Letter to Joseph Fish, 4 June 1754, Osborn Letters, Mss. Boxes "O" Folder 3, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester.

to Pilfer, Lye, or call Names). In the interest of presenting all the facts, she does warn Fish that Bobey "Loves Play." Anxious and apologetic over the potential imposition of her request, she backpedals and explains that, even if Fish cannot take him, that she wants to find a master who will "allow him the Priviledge of attending Publick Worship." Though Bobey's enslaved status underpins the entire letter, her words inescapably paint a picture of a lively child. They also expose Osborn's maternal feelings, feelings that she carefully controls by never referring to him by name, only as her "Negro boy." As his mistress and as a Christian, she has a duty to the needs of his "Soul as well as body." To her mind, keeping him in her home and continuing to coddle him would be wrong. After all, she had also sent her own son to Rehoboth, Massachusetts, as an apprentice a decade before.

In listing church attendance as one of her criteria for Bobey's temporary home, Osborn was acting as a conscientious evangelical woman whose state of grace made spirituality a matter-of-fact and constant consideration. Such an attitude had been a foundational component of her life at least since her conversion in 1734, soon after her first widowhood. Several years later, she was admitted as a full member of the First Congregational Church of Newport. In the early 1740s, the Great Awakening religious revivals sweeping New England inspired her to assist in establishing a women's prayer group, or, as she termed it, a female society. Though the female society lapsed as the Great Awakening enthusiasm waned, at least in her locale, the meetings resumed in

1760.<sup>6</sup> As the leader and host of the society's weekly and sometimes biweekly meetings, Osborn was an example of piety for the greater community, and she was instrumental in leading a local religious revival that peaked in 1766-67. The revival involved a wide swathe of Newport society, including white men and women of all ages and classes as well as the local black population. A decade later, after much of Newport emptied due to British occupation during the American Revolution and even her church's minister chose exile, she stayed behind and held church gatherings in her home. Though the church never regained its financial or numerical strength after the war, Osborn remained a member until her death in 1796 at the age of eighty-three.

As a Congregationalist, Osborn appears to have been a moderate New Light and evangelical.<sup>7</sup> She believed in providentialism, the view that God's hand is in everything and one can interpret secular, spiritual, and natural events as signs of God's design and judgment. She also ardently advocated grace over works, but seems, like many Congregationalists, to have understood works as something of a sign of grace. While she supported infant baptism, she had strict standards for communion. Only those truly saved and living pious lives could take communion. She herself, even after her conversion

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<sup>6</sup> This society continued to meet after Osborn's death in 1796. The General Assembly of Rhode Island officially recognized the society in 1806 under the name the Religious Female Society. In 1826, it was renamed the Osborn Society.

<sup>7</sup> When referring to Osborn's church affiliation and institutional aspects of her religion, such as church governance and the role of lay piety, I use the term Congregationalist. When discussing the emotional and idiomatic aspects of her spirituality, I use the term evangelical since not all Congregationalists would have agreed with her placement of religious affection at the center of her relationship with God. Since it does not refer to a specific Protestant sect, evangelical is a less easily defined term than Congregational, and I rely upon Rodger M. Payne's definition which describes evangelicalism as "part of a larger religious phenomenon" (as opposed to being denominationally specific) and as "characterized by [its] attention to affective piety as the key to effective religion" (3). Evangelicalism sought "to foster this affective piety by demanding that individuals seek to obtain a personal experience of divine forgiveness and salvation" (3). See *The Self and the Sacred: Conversion and Autobiography in Early American Protestantism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998).



experience, waited several years until she took her first communion. Finally, ministerial authority was a central tenet of her worship. She constantly fretted that her actions might be taken as a challenge to that authority. For example, though the minister of her church was known as an unreliable drunk, she continued to support him, even in letters. She sought approval from ministers to engage in prayer with her students and the presence of ministers at the religious meetings in her home.

Writing was an integral part of Osborn's worship. In 1743, shortly before her thirtieth birthday, she began keeping a spiritual diary. Around that same time, she also wrote a memoir of the first thirty years of her life in which she describes her conversion. She cites two reasons to explain her decision to write her memoirs:

The first motive [. . .] was, that I might be excited to praise and glorify that God who has wrought such wonders for me[. . .] Secondly,

I have always reaped much benefit myself, by reading the lives and experiences of others. Sometimes they have been blessed to convince me of sin -- Sometimes to, scatter doubts -- And sometimes to raise my affections into a flame. When expressions have been warm, they have put me upon imitating them as well as I could, by breathing my soul out in like manner. And though I ever fall so short of the excellencies with which others have been endowed; yet I know all things are possible with God[. . .] If a word in these lines ever proves useful to one soul, after my decease, it will be ten thousand times more than I deserve from the hands

of a bountiful God[.] (*Memoirs* 56)<sup>8</sup>

Her reasoning attests to what she saw as the simultaneously personal and communal utility of her writing, a purpose that her minister, Samuel Hopkins, furthered after her death by publishing her memoirs along with extracts from her diaries.<sup>9</sup> In 1807, a publisher in Newport also printed some letters written by Osborn and her friend Susanna Anthony, a woman known locally for her intense spirituality though hers was understood as a more withdrawing, contemplative piety than Osborn's engaged and vocal version. Additionally, in 1755, Osborn anonymously published a religious tract, *The Nature, Certainty and Evidence of True Christianity*. It is written as an epistle and may have originally been a letter to Anthony. Though Osborn repeatedly insists upon her unworthiness in her writings, to her contemporary readers and to those who examine her life, it is clear that they influenced a variety of individuals in her local community.

Osborn's extant writings -- memoirs, epistolary exhortation, letters, and diaries -- are all forms of life writing. Life writing is "a general term for writing of diverse kinds that takes a life as its subject," according to Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (3). The author's memories, beliefs, and experiences are the primary source of content; the author's life or a period in the author's life is the primary subject. Because "[s]uch writing can be biographical, novelistic, historical, or an explicit self-reference to the

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<sup>8</sup> Where possible and for ease of reference, I have quoted from published versions of Osborn's writing, even when those texts also exist in original, manuscript versions. Two of these, Osborn's *Memoirs* and Osborn's and Anthony's *Familiar Letters*, were edited in the decade or so after Osborn's death. The editors of these texts have altered spelling and capitalization, and added punctuation (Osborn used markedly less punctuation than can be found in the published versions).

<sup>9</sup> Brekus believes that it was Samuel Hopkins's wife, not Hopkins himself, who edited Osborn's *Memoirs*. See Catherine A. Brekus's *Sarah Osborn's World: The Rise of Evangelicalism in America* (forthcoming from Knopf).

writer" (Smith and Watson 3), life writing is a genre which is more expansive than but still inclusive of autobiography, the form of life writing which has received the most critical attention.<sup>10</sup> While many examples of life writing, such as conversion narratives and memoirs, have a narrative structure, others may be more episodic or serialized, as in the case of diaries and letters.

The most prevalent form of life writing in eighteenth-century New England was the spiritual autobiography, an admittedly highly formulaic sub-genre. Because many of these included or relied upon conversion narratives and because conversion narratives, in the case of Congregationalists, had to be submitted orally or in written form to one's church before one could attain full membership, these texts are often arguments that reinforce understandings of community and the requirements of belonging. Sarah Osborn's is no exception. Spiritual diaries, on the other hand, are episodic. Daniel B. Shea, Jr.'s comparison of spiritual autobiographies with diaries insists upon a "division of duties" between the forms, and argues that a diary "would fail [ . . . ] if the writer could not bring himself to view his most abhorrent self" (142). In contrast to the consistent argument in favor of the author's conversion found in spiritual autobiographies and conversion narratives, a spiritual diary from this period, therefore, might at moments

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<sup>10</sup> The study of autobiography and life writing is a broad field. Many studies center upon autobiography, a term and form which did not crystallize until the nineteenth century. For examples of texts that focus primarily upon life writing in the eighteenth century and/or early America, see Shea; Felicity Nussbaum's *The Autobiographical Subject: Gender and Ideology in Eighteenth-Century England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); Imbarato; and Rodger M. Payne's *The Self and the Sacred: Conversion and Autobiography in Early American Protestantism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998). For examples of texts that focus primarily upon gender in life writing, see the essays in *Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism*, ed. by Estelle C. Jelinek (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980); *De/Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*, ed. by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992); and *Women's Life Writing and Imagined Communities*, ed. by Cynthia Huff (London: Routledge, 2005).

explicitly or implicitly argue for the uncertainty of one's spiritual conversion and should reveal on-going evidence of sin, unworthiness, and doubt. The primary audience is God, and the author might be more pressed than in a spiritual autobiography or conversion narrative to write with humility and honesty in the face of an omnipotent and all-knowing reader.

Though Osborn wrote in these two genres as well as in letters, it is not very useful to distinguish some of her writings as public and some as private. For Osborn and many other evangelicals, such a distinction was not meaningful when describing religious life and writings. After the second birth of conversion, everything one did or did not do was evidence of the experience of grace. Additionally, for Osborn, the spiritual ends justified the means. Even if a text was intended to be shared with only a limited audience or even never to be shared at all, those intentions were meaningless if the texts had spiritual use. Osborn herself went against the wishes of her friend, Susanna Anthony, and shared private letters with a correspondent, the Reverend Joseph Fish, because they were so "Pleasur[able]" to read (Letter Dec. 1750). Acknowledging that he would likely show them to others, she pressed him to "secrecy" because she feared Anthony, worrying about seeming prideful of writing, would stop. Therefore, Osborn must have been aware that even her own wishes were no guarantee of her words' privacy.

As this last thought about the convergence of public and private suggests, colonial American life writing deeply implicated the individual and the community. Susan Clair Imbarrato contends that, because "the individual self is barely distinct from the larger social community," life writing from the period seeks to simultaneously "enhance

spiritual commitment and improve community welfare" (xiii). Despite the interwoven nature of self and community during this period, Imbarrato argues that it was, in fact, a period of transition, and her book traces "an increasing subjectivity in first-person narratives" (12). She argues that authors used them initially to self-examine and self-monitor, thereby confirming their communal attachments, but that gradually they used them to self-construct and moved towards the autonomous and solitary self model found in the romantic examples that appeared in the nineteenth century.

As in the case of Imbarrato, an interest in the role of the self and subjectivity in eighteenth-century life writing is perhaps the dominant shared concern amongst its critics. Though their definitions of the self may differ, scholars of the genre including Imbarrato as well as Felicity Nussbaum and Rodger M. Payne, see the autobiography as a discourse that embodies the eighteenth-century trajectory of communitarianism to individualism, a trajectory grounded in Enlightenment philosophy. They often implicitly or explicitly connect this trajectory to the development of the modern democracy and the nation-state, especially in the case of studies of American examples. They delight in the tensions, ruptures, and possibilities that this period provided and that its life writing texts display.

Sarah Osborn's life writing, as will be apparent in my analysis, displays a reverse trajectory similar to other deeply religious female contemporaries.<sup>11</sup> In her texts, she uses her personal experience of God to imagine a community in which her individuality,

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, *The Journal of Esther Edwards Burr 1754-1757*, ed. Carol F. Karlsen and Laurie Crumpacker (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

though present and necessary, is also subsumed to communal purposes.<sup>12</sup> Instead of glorifying the self, she appears to find fulfillment in nurturing spirituality generally and in otherwise maintaining the hierarchies of gender and authority, thereby justifying her work as adding to community and placing her subjectivity at its service. Moreover, the type of community that Osborn contributes to is not national in its configuration. Communal kinship, for her, has much to do with shared spirituality and personal knowledge, and is therefore decidedly local.

Osborn's writings have rarely been analyzed with the literary eye. As is the case for most of the women studied in this dissertation, the tendency has been instead to explore their texts for historiographic insight. The few scholars discussing Osborn's life and work have either focused upon her relationships with male religious leaders<sup>13</sup> or primarily considered the radicalism of her work and its often subtle resistance to gender and racial norms.<sup>14</sup> Because such work has been primarily historiographic, the nuances of her linguistic choices have been for the most part ignored. Similarly, perhaps because some may find her focus upon spiritual matters to be tedious and repetitive, they miss the subtle yet significant role that maternal feelings play in her life. This chapter, through its pairing of close reading with historical and biographical context, seeks to provide a new understanding of Osborn's life and the role that affect, family, and spirituality played

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<sup>12</sup> Osborn's writing, therefore, resembles that of the authors analyzed in *Women's Life Writing and Imagined Communities* (London: Routledge, 2005). In her introduction, its editor, Cynthia Huff writes, "[W]omen's life writing frequently did not follow the romantic conception of the isolated artist, but more relational and communal patterns" (5). This understanding of individual empowerment through community formation is one way in which feminist studies can assist early American scholarship.

<sup>13</sup> See for example Barbara A. Lacey's "The Bonds of Friendship: Sarah Osborn of Newport and the Reverend Joseph Fish of North Stonington, 1743-1779" in *Rhode Island History* 45.4 (1986), 127-36, and Sheryl A. Kujawa's "'The Path of Duty Plain': Samuel Hopkins, Sarah Osborn, and Revolutionary Newport" in *Rhode Island History* 58.3 (2000), 75-89.

<sup>14</sup> See Norton and Crane.

within it.

- **Spiritual Crisis**

*"thou knowest the tempest in my breasts": A Betrayal of Faith and Family*

On December 7, 1761, Osborn wrote the third diary entry of the spiritual crisis and exposes that she has been questioning her initial decision to sell Bobey. She writes:

o Lord forgive thou knowest the tempest in my breasts Lord shall I never get the world under my feet thou that knowest all things knowest my conflicts ever since Thursday Night -- at first with tenderness to Phillis and Bobey both my Heart clinging to them so Loth to grieve Her or Part with Him that I was ready on that accompt to give up what appears to be duty and for the Boys good both soul and body but ever since friday Night my struggle has been of another kind I have from resentment been ready to give him up to His fathers and Mothers will since they cant believe that Either his Master or I Have Honesty enough to speak the truth, or at all to aim at His good. oh How Hard it Has been to me to be thus mistrusted by Phillis to whom I think I Have never been unfaithful by Her who I always thot Had a better opinion of me[ . . . ] give me grace to overcom[e] my anger and grief and to do that that I can answer to god and conscience either in Life or at Death and Judgement Let who will be Pleasd or displeas'd O Let me not be willing to give the child up to be expos'd to Hardships and ruin to gratifie them (Diary 1761-2 195-7)

This passage reviews the series of possibilities Osborn has considered for resolving the

situation and restoring peace in her household. At first, she thought she would relent out of "tenderness to Phillis and Bobey"; Osborn worries about "griev[ing] Her or Part[ing] with Him." Rejecting this possibility, she then indicates that she plans to relent because she feels "resentment." Perhaps recognizing the seeming pettiness of her words, later in the entry Osborn asks God for the "grace to overcom[e her] anger and grief." Apparently realizing that simply giving in out of resentment would be the worst possible choice, she decides that her primary responsibility will be to her "god and conscience." She appears to be returning to her original decision to sell Bobey.

In this entry, it seems as if Osborn feels betrayed by Phillis. In the first place, she remarks that Phillis and Bobey's father "cant believe that Either his Master or I Have Honesty enough to speak the truth, or at all to aim at His good." Moreover, she declares that she has never been "unfaithful" to Phillis, whom she "always thot Had a better opinion of" her. These statements resound with Osborn's hurt. In New England, enslaved black persons often lived alongside their owners, sharing the same domestic space, including at mealtimes and family prayer. This integrated arrangement meant that enslaved persons also lived alongside the other members of their owner's household such as relatives, dependents, apprentices, and other domestic servants -- indentured and enslaved -- as well as the black, white, and Native residents of the larger community.<sup>15</sup> Therefore, Osborn and Phillis shared the intimacy of a local community, an intimacy that would have been deepened by their participation in the same female society. If Phillis

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<sup>15</sup> For a discussion of family slavery in New England, see William D. Piersen's *Black Yankees: The Development of an Afro-American Subculture in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 25-36.



did occasionally assist Osborn with her domestic and school work, this shared labor would have added to their relationship. Potentially, they prayed together, worked together, and took care of schoolchildren together, some of which were as young as three. And, when considering these layers of intimate connection, one cannot forget the fact that Osborn owned Phillis's son, an unofficial yet still appreciable connection. Perhaps because Phillis and Osborn share such intimacy, Osborn feels that Phillis's anger is a moment of disloyalty on the part of a neighbor, even extended family member, just as Phillis may see Osborn's plan to sell Bobey as a betrayal for the same reason.

If Phillis and Osborn are members of the same extended family, then Osborn is the mother. And, if she is the mother, she is responsible for Bobey's *and* Phillis's spirituality. In her examination of mothering in colonial New England, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich describes mothering as extensive and reasons that it should be understood expansively as including not only children, but also servants, neighborhood children, and grandchildren (158). Due to the numerous duties of a colonial mother and because of the fragility of life, one of the most important aspects of nurturing was to instill piety in one's charges (Ulrich 158). Osborn herself, rushing to the distant deathbed of her eleven-year-old son in 1744, a child she felt great affection for, was most concerned with ensuring his salvation, not saying goodbye or comforting his final moments. Moreover, New England's religious leaders advocated Christian education for enslaved persons and identified it as the responsibility of slaveowners. For example, Cotton Mather, in his widely-read eighteenth-century pamphlet *The Negro Christianized*, urges his readers to glorify themselves and God by converting the enslaved persons they had bought and

instructs masters to teach their slaves that the Fifth Commandment requires them to be "dutiful" to their owners just as it requires white Christians to honor their fathers and mothers (28). As Mather's words in particular suggest, there is a linear correlation between God, slaveowners, and enslaved individuals that echoes the linkages between God, parents, and children. Therefore, it would seem to Osborn that Phillis's defiance, especially when Osborn acts out of concern for Bobey's soul and especially when Phillis does so during a prayer meeting, exposes Osborn's inadequacy as a spiritual mother and makes apparent her simultaneous distance from her progeny and from God.

Phillis is able to reveal such rifts because she possesses a natural maternal authority over Bobey that rivals Osborn's artificial authority over him as spiritual mother. As Bobey's biological mother, Phillis's anger cannot simply be ignored. Significantly, it is precisely at this point in the crisis that Osborn talks about her affection for Phillis and Bobey. Though she had initially criticized Phillis for her "tenderness," now she admits that she herself feels "tenderness" and reveals that her "Heart cling[s] to them." At the same time, she suggests that she is selfless and Phillis is selfish when she determinedly prays, "[G]ive me grace to overcom[e] my anger and grief and to do that that I can answer to god and conscience either in Life or at Death and Judgement Let who will be Pleas'd or displeas'd O Let me not be willing to give the child up to be expos'd to Hardships and ruin to gratifie them." Phillis's anger now appears self-indulgent in contrast to Osborn's self-sacrificing stoicism.

In mirroring Phillis's "tenderness," while also continuing to insist upon her own duty, Osborn's words suggest that the path to her spiritual crisis's resolution lies not in

disregarding, placating, or compromising with Phillis, but in negating Phillis's remaining affective authority. If Osborn is Bobey's only mother, sincerely attending to his spiritual *and* affective needs, then her decisions will be unequivocally the right ones, and she can reconcile with God.

To establish herself as *the* mother instead of *a* mother, Osborn must perform a task that in some ways she had already completed. Ever since her conversion experience almost two decades before, she had been co-parenting with God a divine family composed of her dependents and the local women attending meetings of the female society. In her anonymously published exhortation, she writes of her conversion as a moment of spiritual and physical surrender: "I do know that God compell'd or *sweetly constrained me to throw down* the Weapons of my Rebellion and to *submit* to HIM as *Prince and Saviour* [. . .] God enabled me to *give myself, my whole Soul and Body with all my Concerns* for Time and Eternity into his merciful and faithful Hands" (*Nature* 5, emphasis in original). She ecstatically articulates thankfulness for her surrender and compares it to a marital act: "Oh happy Choice! oh happy I, that I liv'd to see that Day wherein God betroth'd me to himself in loving Kindness and tender Mercy!" (*Nature* 6). Throughout these lines, Osborn represents her conversion as a pleasurable and physical submission to God, a marriage in which she performs the conventionally feminine role.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> In doing so, Osborn displays the sensuality and physicality that Susan Juster indicates is most characteristic of women's spirituality. Juster maintains, "In the case of eighteenth-century New England, it was not that male evangelicals did not conceive of their relationship with God as one of intimate union, but rather that it was women who seem to have imbued this union with a heightened sensuality" (66). Elizabeth Maddock Dillon also identifies this difference, though her analysis considers more explicitly the role of the body in intimate spiritual language. See "Nursing Fathers and Brides of Christ: The Feminized Body of the Puritan Convert" in *A Centre of Wonders: The Body in Early America*, eds. Janet Moore Lindman and Michele Lise Tarter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 137-9.

In doing so, she proves her state of grace to others as well as provides her experience with a sense that it has been irrevocably consummated.

When Osborn casts her divine relationship as a marriage, she employs a metaphor recurrent in women's *and* men's colonial era spiritual writings.<sup>17</sup> For example, sermons often represent Christ as a bridegroom and use a Bride of Christ metaphor.<sup>18</sup> New England ministers such as Peter Bulkeley asserted, "It is a marriage-covenant that we make with God [. . .] therefore we must do as the Spouse doth, resigne up our selves to be ruled and governed according to his will" (50). Scholars of American religion have long noticed this propensity, and Osborn is not particularly unique in turning to this image. Yet, perhaps because her conversion experience occurs soon after her husband's death and perhaps because so much of her prayer occurs through the act of writing, this metaphor appears to have been particularly meaningful to Osborn's spiritual identity.

Comforted by a sensual and marital spiritual experience in her early widowhood, Osborn returns again to God as part of her grieving process in the face of additional family losses. In a letter written to her closest friend Susanna Anthony soon after her

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<sup>17</sup> For works which examine this imagery in Puritan writings and theology see Edmund S. Morgan's "The Puritan's Marriage with God" in *South Atlantic Quarterly* 48.1 (1949), 107-12; Margaret Masson's "The Typology of the Female as a Model for the Regenerate: Puritan Preaching, 1690-1730" in *Signs* 2.2 (1976), 304-15; Philip Greven's *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York: Knopf, 1977), 124-40; Walter Hughes's "'Meat Out of the Eater': Panic and Desire in American Puritan Poetry" in *Engendering Men: The Question of Male Feminist Criticism*, eds. Joseph A. Boone and Michael Cadden (New York: Routledge, 1990), 102-21; Schweitzer; Porterfield; and Elizabeth Maddock Dillon's "Nursing Fathers and Brides of Christ: The Feminized Body of the Puritan Convert" in *A Centre of Wonders: The Body in Early America*, eds. Janet Moore Lindman and Michele Lise Tarter (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 129-43. It should be noted that other Christians, especially women mystics, had been turning to this idiom for centuries. For discussions of female mystics and sexualized Christ imagery, see the essays in Caroline Walker Bynum's *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991). Bynum also discusses the topic in *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) and connects it to others' conceptions of Christ.

<sup>18</sup> These New England writers were inspired by the New Testament parable of the bridegroom and the virgins. See Matthew 25:1-13. Osborn retells the parable in her diary. See *Memoirs* 346-8.

eleven-year-old son Samuel's death in 1744, she movingly explains how God repeatedly consoles her:

Sometimes [God] will visit me with affliction; he will take away the husband of my youth, and thereby cause me to fly to the Widow's God, and rejoice in him, as the best of husbands! At another time, he will take away a tender father, and enable me to acquiesce in his dispensation, and rejoice in him, as my father's God, as my God; and a father of the fatherless! Then he will remove an only brother, and thereby cause me more fully to know, what it is to be resigned to his will, and to adore his sovereignty!

Again, lest my heart should be joined to idols, he will have an only son! and show me at the same time, that he is better to me, than ten sons! Ah, than ten thousand sons, or all earthly enjoyments! (Osborn and Anthony 50)

In this passage, God becomes her husband and her father, and replaces her brother and her son. Her joy in these relationships arises from her experience of grace and from the solace they bring to her in the face of loss. Her supple affiliation with the divine resolves the fissures in her earthly family.

Osborn's familial and principally marital relationship to God also comforts her at moments other than the death of a loved one. For example, in 1754, during a time of spiritual doubt, she finds solace in the knowledge that an "omnipoten[t]" God may reclaim her unfaithful soul (Letter Nov. 1754). She imagines this moment as another

wedding ceremony and even inscribes God's vows onto the page: "I will, she shall be cleansed, I will, she shall be Holy: [. . .] I will subdue her iniquities I will keep her by my mighty Power thro faith unto salvation, I will strengthen her, I will uphold her by the right Hand of my righteousness. I will [. . .] take Possession of her soul and body for my self." In another example, she depends upon God to sustain her during the 1755 New England earthquake.<sup>19</sup> Writing to Joseph Fish on December 10, 1755, several weeks after the earthquake, she reports that before it struck during the night, she "awak'd" and "lay delightfully contemplating [God's] adorable Perfections especially His goodness" (Letter Dec. 1755). When she felt the ground trembling, her "soul dart ed up to him in ejaculations yt God would Sancti[on] this shock for the awakening and quick[e]ning of his People." Rather than fearing God's "fierce wrath," Osborn lay "becalm'd in His bosom sucking by faith the breast of the Promises given me by a faithful God" and sensed that God was giving her "a Pledge of his Love and faithfulness." Her letter, in which she tells of laying in bed, enjoying the pleasure of her relationship with God, and serenely welcoming the tremors of an unexpected earthquake that terrified others, evokes an image of a marriage bed and sexual intercourse. In both examples, she finds reassurance of her grace through re-consummating her relationship to God.

The 1755 earthquake letter in particular suggests that, despite the ubiquity of the marital metaphor to describe the divine relationship, Osborn in fact feels uniquely favored since even other saints find the earthquake terrifying and since its providential

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<sup>19</sup> For an essay which surveys the references to the 1755 earthquake, most especially in sermons, see Charles Edwin Clark's "Science, Reason, and an Angry God: The Literature of an Earthquake" in *New England Quarterly* 38.3 (1965), 340-62.

message is personally directed.<sup>20</sup> And, as is evident in a further reading of the letter, the letter extends upon her uniquely favored status and motivates a sense of vigorous spiritual empowerment. First, Osborn renders herself as an involved collaborator in her divine marriage. While in some moments she simply lies in bed, in others she is "sucking" at "his bosom" and "dart[ing]" to God in "ejaculations." Though the image of suckling at God's breast could indicate the infantilism of her position, its occurrence alongside other sensual and at times masculine imagery stresses its erotic, and therefore more active, nature. Second, her experience of divine corporal comfort inspires her to proselytize. She rapturously writes:

[O] love him more my soul oh yt I could so speak of the glorious excellencies of my dear redeemer as to be made an instrument in his Hand of bring ing thousands and ten thousands to bow to the sceptre of his grace -- sure I am they never would repent nor would they change their Position for all the riches of the indi[e]s and then thousand times more but this is an honour not to be expected by worthless me nor does God stand in any Need of me[.] (Letter Dec. 1755)

She wants to be an "instrument" in God's "Hand," and she desires that "thousands and ten thousands" would "bow to the sceptre of his grace." While she certainly pictures herself as a divine tool, subject to God's will, and while she includes the requisite expression of "worthless[ness]," becoming an agent of God also appears to provide her with an

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<sup>20</sup> One of Fish's letters to Osborn may in fact chide her for the prideful tone of this letter. In a December 17, 1756 letter to Fish, Osborn refers to his description of her as "fraught with Pride." See Osborn Letters, Mss. Boxes "O" Folder 4, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester.

extension of God's masculine agency since the words "instrument" and "sceptre" evoke the shape and force of a phallus. The passage is ambiguous as to what exactly the "sceptre" of God's "grace" is; Osborn may or may not be it. In either case, her experience of the earthquake and her heightened sense of intimacy with God cause her to feel aligned with, even as she is subjected to, its power.

As an extensive mother (to use Ulrich's term) to her stepchildren, step-grandchildren, servants, slaves, parents of her slaves, and students,<sup>21</sup> Osborn had an obvious audience upon which to deploy her spiritual empowerment. After all, she was already accountable for the spiritual education of her dependents. Yet, since she seems to have taken her position as God's bride almost literally, her duties are no longer simply universal maternal expectations and are also acts of surrogacy invested with the suggestion of divine authority. In charge of a large household, she merges the earthly with the spiritual and behaves as an appropriate wife, albeit with a divine husband.

Osborn herself locates the moment of her acquisition of maternal responsibilities to a divine family in her conversion. Immediately after describing it as an encounter during which she was "ravished with [Christ's] love" (*Memoirs* 32), she aligns "more intimate communion with God" and becoming "instrumental in advancing his kingdom and interest in the world" (*Memoirs* 33). She then praises God for "mak[ing] use of me for the instruction of little ones" (*Memoirs* 33). The little ones to which she refers include at this time both her stepchildren and her pupils. She is careful to not suggest that

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<sup>21</sup> The children of one of Henry Osborn's sons moved in with her after their father died in 1759. Another son died around the same time, and she helped support that son's widow and children even though they did not live with them.



she views her "instruction" of children as a justification through works, a philosophy vehemently argued against by evangelicals. Instead, her words suggest a spiritual family in which God is the father and head of household. As the mother within the household, she shares a special intimacy with God and the responsibility to raise children with the values of the household.

Significantly, later in the same paragraph she furthers this suggestion of a unique spiritual authority over her dependents by relying upon a rhetoric of parturition to describe her work. She writes, "Surely I longed that all the world, but especially those dear to me by the bonds of nature or friendship, might be convinced of sin, and come to a glorious Christ. I thought I could even spend and be spent for them. I thought I could travail in birth until Christ was formed in them" (*Memoirs* 33-4). That she views her efforts in the spiritual instruction of others as maternal is apparent in her allusion to such labors as the "travail[s]" of "birth." Moreover, her words intimate that she is something of a Mary figure, giving birth to new embodiments of Christ as a result of her intercourse with the divine. And, just as Mary imparted her humanity to Jesus, Osborn necessarily bestows something of her spirituality upon her progeny even as they are formed in God's image as well. Since she, like Mary, partners with God to conceive these children, her words imply that she is more than simply a divine tool. She shares somewhat in God's authority even as she remains appropriately subservient.

The above lines also reveal that Osborn's maternal spiritual authority extends to adults as well as children. She desires to "convinc[e]" "those dear to me by the bonds of nature or friendship," a group necessarily inclusive of some grown persons. In writing

about this desire in a paragraph initially about the instruction of "little ones," she seems to place her friends and family, including Phillis, in the position of children awaiting instruction. When she mentions that she "thought [she] could even spend and be spent for them," her words recall ejaculation and fiscal outlays, and thus evoke images of distribution and dispensation.<sup>22</sup> She suggests that her instruction will be prolific and diffuse.

Osborn repeats this subtle expansion of her spiritual charge in a diary entry from December 3, 1760. While praying for God's assistance in educating her pupils, she implores God, "O now set me apart for thyself. Now let me serve thee and my generation, according to thy will, with the greatest cheerfulness, diligence and faithfulness" (*Memoirs* 258-9). These lines indicate a linear progression: first, she is "set . . . apart" for God and then she "serve[s]" God and "my generation." This linear progression resembles the traditional order of first marriage and then children. Osborn subtly depicts herself as the appropriately nurturing and obedient wife and mother within the divine family. Recall that, by 1760, her only child was dead. Her "generation," therefore, cannot be her actual generation since she has none, and likely refers to her pupils and perhaps her resident step-grandchildren if not all her dependents. Yet several sentences later she pleads for God to "[t]ake hold of the heart of every one thou committest to my charge, if it may be thy holy will. In the arms of faith I bring them every one to thee" (*Memoirs* 258-9). In avoiding specificity about who she wants to

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<sup>22</sup> References to money and value occur fairly frequently in Osborn's writing and are worthy of additional study. For an argument connecting Puritan spirituality to economic rhetoric, see Mark A. Peterson's *The Price of Redemption: The Spiritual Economy of Puritan New England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

instruct, her prayer creates a nurturing space open to anyone that God might "commit to [her] charge." She appears simultaneously humble and assertive about her capabilities. She is submissive to God's will, but ready to "bring them every one" in her capacious "arms of faith." If it is God's will, she is prepared to be mother to all.

Osborn may have felt that such a display of maternal self-confidence was allowable, even proper. In colonial New England, women could be assertive and authoritative mothers precisely because the hierarchy of marriage and household unquestionably viewed a woman as subservient to her husband and her actions as extensions of his will. Furthermore, Osborn's home, Newport, was a place where women not only could but frequently had to be active participants within the community. Due to the city's role as a seaport and its heavy casualties in the Seven Years' War, Newport's population increasingly had more women than men (Crane 14). Many women were widows or virtual widows, heading their households in the absence of dead or seafaring husbands. Some remained uncertain about their marital status after months and years without news as to whether or not their husbands lived. These women frequently found work to sustain themselves and their families. Women in Newport acted as merchants, schoolteachers, sailmakers, candlemakers, bakers, and printers. Thus, Osborn had ample opportunity to see, know, and, as a widow herself, be one of Newport's cadre of capable women who took on exceptional and difficult duties out of obedience to their husbands and/or their own desires and necessity.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> It should be noted that while Osborn and other women may have found self-confidence in such an environment, it was economically disadvantageous. Elaine Forman Crane, in her study of demographics of colonial New England coastal cities, finds that Newport's increasing gender imbalance resulted in an

The opportunity to enfold non-dependents into Osborn's divine family came from some of these same women. In 1741, in the midst of the Great Awakening revivals sweeping New England, women from her church, the First Congregational Church of Newport, admired the depth of her divine relationship and invited her to lead their new female society. She tells the tale of its beginning in her memoirs: "[A] number of young women, who were awakened to a concern for their souls, came to me, and desired my advice and assistance, and proposed to join in a society; provided I would take the care of them. To which, I trust with a sense of my own unworthiness, I joyfully consented" (*Memoirs* 49-50). Though Osborn is careful to include the customary statement of "unworthiness," her version of the society's origin suggests that her role is foundational to its creation. Furthermore, her role is clearly maternal. She not only stresses that the women were "young," an adjective that implies that she is their elder, but also carefully notes that the women asked her to "take the care of them," thereby characterizing her role as a maternal nurturing one.

As the female society's mother, Osborn could bring its members into her divine family and intensify her own marital relationship to God. In a diary entry from January 19, 1761, written not long after the society had resumed after its post-Great Awakening lapse, she intercedes on behalf of the society's prayers:

And will not God answer our united requests, for Jesus' sake? Dear Lord,  
we would please and rely upon thy own gracious promise, That where  
were two or three are met in thy name, there thou wilt be in the midst of

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economic system in which women could typically only perform low paying work and in which women became "more dependent and less autonomous" (4).

them: And if two or three are agreed to ask any thing in thy name, it shall be granted. O Lord, were not more of us than that number engaged in begging the destruction of sin and increase of grace, that thou mayest be glorified [. . .] O God, grant it for thine own name's sake. Lord, grant it, and we shall glorify thee; if thou wilt transform us into thine own image, by giving us lively views of thy perfections. The more we see thee as thou art, the more we shall be like thee. (*Memoirs* 265).<sup>24</sup>

These lines from her diary reveal her belief in the society's spiritual power. As a community, it has greater access to God than the members do when praying individually and alone. The intimate nature of that access is insinuated when Osborn asks God for "lively views of thy perfections" and to see God "as thou art." Her words suggest a God bared before them in all God's divine glory. As a result, all parties, including God, are glorified, and the women "transform . . . into [God's] own image." Though Osborn never mentions her leadership role, perhaps out of humility, as its leader she is an essential component of this sensual exchange. She assists in the extension of God's grace and grafts the community of women onto her favored relationship with God, thereby increasing her own and their spiritual authority and grace. It should be noted that the relationship Osborn facilitates between these women and God resembles in some ways her divine marriage. Instead of infantilizing the women, she permits them an erotic feminine spirituality that she contains by subsuming their individuality through their transformations into images of God. She remains unique because she is the society's

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<sup>24</sup> Osborn refers to Matthew 18:20 -- "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

leader, a fact which, though unstated, acts as a subtext to the entire entry and which is subtly reinforced by the entry's tone of wifely cajoling.

Though, as in the above entry, Osborn typically downplays her leadership of the society and discusses her role as if she is simply another member of the female society, her careful humility frequently escapes her control, and her language reveals her distance and even superiority to the others. For example, in an April 2, 1761 diary entry, she asks, while writing about the society, "Dear Lord, quicken thy dear children and strengthen them; encourage and comfort them. O build us up. Smile upon us [. . .] O, let this society be a nursery for piety" (*Memoirs* 270). Osborn's pronouns shift from the third person to the first person after the first sentence. When talking about "thy dear children" and praying for God to "strengthen," "encourage and comfort them," she appears to be praying on behalf of these children and holding herself somewhat separate. However, if God answers her request, God will "build us up" and "[s]mile upon us." This shift in pronouns suggests that Osborn is glorified via the strengthening of the children she leads, a suggestion which highlights a maternal relationship between herself and the members of the society. In using the phrase "nursery for piety," she deepens the subtle characterization of her participation in the society as simultaneously of it and above it.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Though Osborn tried to downplay her leadership of the society, sometimes she struggled with the compromises that decision might force her to make about the society and its membership. While Osborn was fairly tolerant of other denominations and a local Baptist woman was a member of the society, she did not wish the unbaptised or the more radical evangelicals to join their group. In a July 20, 1761 letter to Fish, Osborn relates a conflict between herself and the group: "I would carefully avoid doing any thing that Looks as tho I that I Have Power or authority more then the rest and would gladly Leave it to be determind by the Major Part off us whether to admit [two unbaptised women] or not but I am afraid for I am not sure there is any more then dear Susa that would be of my Mind tis so generally believd that that these Persons are real christians and I dare not say they are not so to their own Master they stand or fall but my Plea is if they and me ought not to fall in with or encourage the Errors of real christians." In this letter, Osborn

Osborn also uses the phrase "a nursery for piety" in a May 10, 1761 letter to Joseph Fish. Worrying that she had never "given [him] an account of the revival of our Society which for Many years had been dropt," she describes how over a year before, women in her Newport, Rhode Island, community had resumed holding weekly religious meetings in her home (Letter May 1761). She notes that the female society now had twenty-six members, including "Mothers with their daughters," who share "a sweet bond of union." According to Osborn, the women "converse on vital and experimental Religion." Because they proceed in "an orderly secret way [and] we Have none that devulges to the world what Passes amongst that I ever heard of," they "enjoy the sweetest freedom with each other." She then reveals, "I have no small Hope yt God is about to revive His own work this dear society was set up when almost all seemd fast asleep if not dead -- and it gradually increases." She concludes by "beg[ging]" Fish's "countless" "Prayers" that their society "may in deed be a Nursery for Piety."

Osborn's letter stresses the unifying effects of the society. One visualizes a loving gathering of women in Osborn's home where the members harmoniously discuss spiritual matters and, confident in each others' discretion, pray over intimate concerns. That some of the attendees are "Mothers with their daughters" only increases the domesticity of the scene. In expressing her desire that the society will be a "nursery for piety," she again subtly underscores her maternal role as God's wife. She labors to bring forth more piety, more converts, more offspring into God's divine family.

In frequently maintaining a self-effacing silence about her maternal leadership of

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seems to believe that the society should operate by democratic rule unless she is a member of the minority. See Osborn Letters, Mss. Boxes "O" Folder 5, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester.

a divine family while subtly making her centrality omnipresent, Osborn's writings reveal a spiritual confidence, almost a complacency, about her favored relationship to God. Her home has indeed been a nursery for piety, and her progeny are numerous and diverse. She can softly rule over her offspring, perhaps gently rebuking, but more often than not, especially in the case of adults, guiding by example. After all, she is the mother and they are the children, properly raised.

- **Resolution**

*"then god gave Him me": Becoming Bobey's Mother*

In light of the centrality of Osborn's divine mother status to her identity, the emergence of a spiritual crisis in the wake of Phillis's angry opposition to Bobey's sale in retrospect seems almost predictable. The fact of Phillis's resistance questions Osborn's status as mother, the efficacy of her spiritual nurturings, and her very relationship to God. Once Phillis undermines these bulwarks of her identity and causes her to feel betrayed, Osborn's diary entries continue to demonstrate that she drowns in a sea of doubt that leaves her parched. She prays, "Lord I beseech thee deliver my Soul O Lord calm my spirits" (Diary 1761-2 198). She painfully admits, "I am weary of this unholy Heart" (Diary 1761-2 200). She grieves and pleads, "I cant controwl the torrent of thots that whirl me down the stream from the fountain Head O Lord Pitty and forgive I Hate them and yet [ere] I am aware indulge them too oh How the world is eating out my duties Lord appear for me" (Diary 1761-2 202). And, on December 12, she darkly reveals, "I am Still at a distance from God dull dry barren wondring I am tuing at the oars continually I carry self Loathing" (Diary 1761-2 202). She seems clearly unused to such a loss of



control. When she finds herself "dull dry barren," she figures her soul as unproductive in terms of her personal spiritual fruits and suggests that her other spiritual fruits to date -- her schoolchildren, her fellow members of the female society -- are either no longer hers or are even corrupted since this moment disconnects her from God, the spousal foundation of her religious family. Her prayers to God for a rapprochement are repeatedly ineffectual, and she attempts again and again to use her spiritual diary as a lifeline and pull herself out of the vortex of her despair.

Finally, on Sunday, December 13, a week after the crisis began, Osborn awakes, encloses herself in her closet, and again attempts to write and pray her way back to God. This morning, her normally clear and steady handwriting initially appears as an uncontrolled scrawl. As she prepares to go to church, she agonizes over the situation and its effects upon her relationship with God:

o Lord Jesus thou yt hast said I will never Leave thee no[r] forsake thee I will never fail thee all the days of my Life Help me to devote this Sabbath to thee o Lord take my thots of[f] from this subject and turn them to thy Self oh that I could Leave off thinking and fall to Praying and Leave all with God to determin Just as He sees best I am wearied out and Heart Sick of thinking and weighing one thing with another and after all can[t] tell what is best Lord Help and Make the Path of duty Plain[.] (Diary 1761-205)

As she writes this entry, her handwriting becomes progressively clearer. Here she appears, unlike in other entries, to find her declarations that she will rely upon God to be

calming and fortifying. She then reiterates her two options. On the one hand, she can sell Bobey, an option justified by fiscal considerations. On the other hand, she can keep him, despite the relief that his sale could spell for her family's meager finances. After all, she is uncertain that a new master would guarantee Bobey's spirituality. She begins to further explore this second option and, as she writes, decides to cancel the sale:

then I turn and think and why should we Part with Him why cant I still trust Him in the Hands of that gracious god that at first [g]ave Him to me and believe that He will take care of both Him and me believe He was given to me in Mercy when I was chierfully giving up all at the call of divine Providence then god gave Him me and was it not in a covenant way was it not in Mercy and [is]nt it ungrateful in me to think it was for a Scourge Had I not better Hope in the Mercy of God and commit Him to Him to keep for me who Has Preferrd Him so Long and Preserv'd Him from falling in to gross sins too He is Honest and averse to drink and is as His Master says more and more faithful & He shall do us all the service god sees best for us He shant nor He cant go to sea Except god Pleases He can contrawl Him if we cant and His Life His Health His Living is in gods Hands the whole disposing is of the Lord and I think I Had rather commit Him to him to keep for me then to commit Him to the care of any Man this is my Present frame and now Lord Help me to Leave Him to thee[.] (Diary 1761-2 207-9)

In this passage, Phillis has disappeared from the discussion. Instead, Osborn continually

refers primarily to a triangular relationship between herself, Bobey, and God, though at moments she shifts to first person plural and includes her husband or possibly his informal master in her references to herself. The first several lines include three variations of the statement that God "gave" Bobey to "me." Bobey appears to be a combination of a gift and a charge. To sell him would be a rejection of God's will. She then twice writes the phrase "keep for me." While God "gave" her Bobey in the past, her use of the word "keep" characterizes her and Bobey's relationship as ongoing and chosen. God, of course, continues to have a central place within her and Bobey's relationship. After all, Bobey's "Life His Health His Living is in gods Hands." Now, because Osborn is God's surrogate, she has Bobey's "Life His Health His Living." Textually, Osborn is the only remaining mother to Bobey, and she is determined to fulfill her duties, even if that means the household's financial problems will continue. The outpourings of emotional turmoil apparent in previous entries are no longer apparent. The affective surfeit caused by Phillis's reaction has been replaced by the calm yet fierce affection of the maternal role.

By textually displacing Phillis and considering her personal duties to Bobey as God's surrogate, Osborn resolves the spiritual crisis. She repairs the rifts in her maternal authority, divine family, and relationship to God that Phillis's anger has exposed by establishing an exclusive bond with Bobey and becoming the only mother. Through this process, she has also become a new kind of mother, one who concerns herself with spiritual *and* affective needs. Now, like Phillis, Osborn cannot abide separation from Bobey, a quite different form of maternal attachment than she displayed towards her own

son over fifteen years before when her duties to his spirituality and future superseded her probable desire to keep him close. She is left with a changed mind and a changed maternal identity.

This moment marks an alteration in the trajectory of Osborn's spiritual life. Her early life writings indicated a rather easy progression from favored position in God's family to divine mother ministering her family, school, and female society. She could unaggressively minister them because they had entered her household either explicitly to be under her care or because they had asked, as in the case of the female society, for her guidance. In contrast, despite Phillis's inescapably subordinate status, her "vex[ation]" about the planned sale of Bobey halts the previously easy progression of Osborn's divine family. A real mother has denied Osborn's maternal authority over another's son. Inscripting prayer after prayer to God, seeking to resolve her crisis, she absorbs Phillis's affectionate motherhood into her own and alters her spiritual course.

- **Aftermath**

*"my poor labors of love": Social Death and Rebirth in Osborn's Divine Family*

For Phillis and Bobey, the after effects of Osborn's spiritual crisis were immediate and likely celebrated. Bobey would not be sold, and mother and son would retain their unofficial yet appreciable connection to each other. Though records do not show what happened to them in the wake of this spiritual crisis, we do know that Osborn does not mention possessing slaves in her 1794 will.<sup>26</sup> We also know that in 1774, six black

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<sup>26</sup> See "Osborn[e]" will filed 6 September 1796, Newport City Hall Department of Property Records, Probate Book No. 3, Page 11, 5 October 1794.

persons resided with Osborn.<sup>27</sup> Perhaps Bobey continued to live with Osborn; perhaps Phillis has come to reside with them as well. And perhaps they did not.

Osborn, though, would not have realized the breadth of consequences that she and her community would experience in the wake of her modified maternity. I would argue that they were significant and broadly transformative. For the remainder of the chapter, through attentiveness to the familial language with which she continues to describe her religious work, I would like to suggest that the last three decades of Osborn's life had their roots in this ten-day long crisis. This period is when Osborn fomented and led the evangelical revival that involved much of Newport. It is also when she began her long relationship with Samuel Hopkins, the Congregationalist minister and eventual public abolitionist. Her diary entries have already demonstrated how her dependence upon a familial idiom to define her identity and to resolve a spiritual crisis was both successful and resulted in unexpected consequences. Her last three decades expose that the decision to keep Bobey was simply a first step in a transformed relationship to persons of color.

In 1764, some local black Christians, probably members of her church, approached Osborn and asked her to lead them in an Ethiopian society, similar to the already well-established female society. Unlike her work with children, white women, and even the occasional black individual such as Phillis, the instruction of a group of black people, especially those who were enslaved, was a more difficult task to undertake.

In accepting this role, she might undermine white authority in the city, both in terms of

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<sup>27</sup> A 1774 census of Newport shows that the members of Osborn household included one male over sixteen (Henry Osborn), two white women over sixteen (Sarah Osborn and probably Susanna Anthony), and six black people. See *Census of the Inhabitants of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, Taken by Order of the General Assembly, in the Year 1774* (Providence: Knowles, Anthony, Co., 1858), 24.

individual households and in terms of the desirability of black submissiveness to society.

To determine the right course of action, Osborn prays over the matter in her diary. She humbly asks, "Lord, overrule for thy own glory, both as to servants and children. Let me not take one step, but what shall indeed be for thy glory, and their good" (*Memoirs* 320). These words conflate the black people seeking her help, referred to as "servants," with children. This characterization infantilizes them. The combination of her humble tone -- that she will "not take one step, but what shall indeed be for God's glory" -- with her identification of a maternal void -- everything she does is for their good -- makes her decision to open her home to an Ethiopian society no longer a matter of potential transgression. Instead, it is the necessary act of a divine mother. To use her own words, God has "committest" these black Christians "to [her] charge," and it would be disobedient of her to refuse.

Some months later, Osborn explains her actions in a letter to Fish. Implying that the society's formation is more recent than it actually is, she informs him that "there is several Ethiopians thotful who Having their Liberty to go where they List on Lords day evenings have ask<sup>e</sup>d Liberty to repair to our House for the benefit of family prayer read[in]g &c and I have thot it a duty to encourage them only charging them never to disobey their Masters &c" (Letter Apr. 1765). She appears almost defiant in her insistence upon the "dut[ifulness]" of her actions. After all, the "Ethiopians" are joining in "family prayer," and she "charg[es] them never to disobey their Masters." Her words again reinforce black persons' subordinate position and what she sees as their childlike dependency. This letter also negotiates the limits of religious education for persons of

color through its careful implication that an autonomous spiritual life does not equate with insubordination. Yet, because she focuses upon the topic of obedience and not respect for slave masters' religious advice, she implies that the masters' authority is merely earthly and that hers, because she will be nurturing their spirituality, partakes of the divine.

Apparently, Osborn's insistence upon the propriety and even necessity of her actions was convincing as the founding of the Ethiopian society did not result in widespread ostracization but instead marked the onset of a religious revival in Newport that was centered in her home.<sup>28</sup> Possibly, Osborn's assumption of a maternal role to the black population indicated to others in her community, including white men, that she could mother them as well. As an increasing number of people joined preexisting meetings, including Baptists and others who were not members of her church, she segmented the attendees by race, gender, age, and other factors, and designated certain times for each group. Interestingly, this process meant that, at least in the beginning, white persons were joining the Ethiopian society on Sunday evenings. By 1767, many days ended or began with some sort of religious meeting at her small house and, according to Osborn's calculations, over five hundred "souls" were attending each week (*Memoirs* 82). At one point, on Sunday nights, free and enslaved black people met with her. Monday evenings were reserved for young women. Tuesdays, with the assistance of Henry Osborn, were set aside for boys and also included some members of the local black community as well. Thursday evenings, the female society continued. Married

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<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, her work was not palatable to everyone and a few did ostracize her (see Brekus), a fact which we can be grateful for since it caused her to explain her work and her motivations in letters to Fish.

men came on Friday evenings. On Saturday mornings, white and black children attended catechism at her home. Young men also came during the week, usually on Wednesday evenings and while her husband was present.<sup>29</sup> Though this list includes a diverse set of groups, the Ethiopian or black society was the centerpiece because its founding in 1764 appears to have encouraged others, except for members of the already well-established and somewhat exclusive female society, to approach Osborn for religious leadership.<sup>30</sup> One could even argue that the society spread her spiritual instruction beyond Newport. Two of its members, Bristol Yamma and John Quamine, went to Africa as missionaries after attaining full admission into the Congregationalist church.

Just as Osborn segmented her flock, she identified different forms of worship for each group. A 1767 letter to Fish provides most of the extant details about the meetings. In that letter, she expresses her apprehension over her weekly activities with the Ethiopian society. While writing about "the poor Blacks on Lords day Evenings" (Norton 522), she explains somewhat of her meetings with them:

To avoid Moving beyond my Line, while I was anxiously desiring the poor creatures should be favrd with some sutable one to pray with them, I was Greatly distresst; but as I could not obtain [help] I Have Given it up and They have not Had above one [prayer] Made with them I believe Sir

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<sup>29</sup> The exact configuration of who attended on which night is difficult to precisely determine since one must piece together different reports. It is likely that the configuration changes over time. And it is possible that when black and white individuals were present on the same night, they gathered as separately as space would allow.

<sup>30</sup> Some might argue that the female society, begun in 1760, actually marked the revival's onset. However, the period of four years between the reconstitution of the female society and the black meeting as well as the rapid growth in meetings after the black meeting began suggests that it was actually the latter which helped spark the revival.



Since you was here. I only read to them talk to them and sing a Psalm or Hymn with them, and then at Eight o clock dismiss them all by Name as upon List. They call it School and I Had rather it should be calld almost any thing that is good than Meeting. I reluct so much at being that Head of any thing that bears that Name. (Norton 523)<sup>31</sup>

Her letter refers explicitly to her "Line" and desire to remain on the proper side. From the way she describes the suitable activities for her "Line" -- reading, lecturing, singing, dismissing them by name -- and her perhaps condescending revelation that the members call the meetings "School," this letter indicates that she validates her work by stressing its pedagogical nature. By extension, then, these black Christians are like children. She instructs them in piety, just as she instructs the "little ones" who attend her school, and thereby absorbs them into her divine family.

Osborn suggests the mother-child configuration of the Ethiopian society in other portions of the same letter. At one point, she portrays them as "cling[ing] and beg[ging] for the Priviledge [of coming to her home]" (Norton 523), a description that characterizes them as childlike and also attests to an emotional relationship between her and them that appears maternal in its configuration. In another moment, she justifies her use of singing during the gatherings of "children servants and other young ones" by referring to Fish's own statements which reason that it is a "duty" to "sin[g] in families in family worship" because it takes "off that Natural bashfulness and backwardness that usualy attend young

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<sup>31</sup> Though I quote from the version published by Norton, the manuscript version of this letter is available at the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester, Massachusetts. See Osborn Letters, Mss. Boxes "O" Folder 7.

ones in congregations. And by this Means [children] were trained for Publick Praise" (Norton 526). Since hearing Fish's argument, Osborn has "practised Singing in our Family, in School, [. . . and] with My Boarders Night and Morning" (Norton 526). Therefore, this portion of her letter concludes, she has "continued the Practice [during meetings at her home that involve young and black people] that I may by the blessing of God on my weak Endeavours train all up for Public praise with whom I am concerned. Am I right or do I Err at this day? Because there is so Many the Servants appear to me no otherwise now then children tho for Stature men and women" (Norton 526). She highlights singing as an activity ideally suited for training certain populations, namely children and black people, and repeatedly identifies the familial nature of that form of worship and training. In doing so, she suggests that what the society does and where it does it, her home, together mark their meetings as a manifestation of family community over which she presides pedagogically and maternally.<sup>32</sup>

Though still Osborn casts her role as nurturing in other portions of the same letter, her descriptions of white meetings highlight the distinctiveness of the above reports about the Ethiopian society. Discussing Friday evenings, when white church "Brethren" including men come to her home, she downplays her role, just as she did in her writings about the female society:

As to friday Evning friends, my dear Sir I by no means Set up for their instructor. They come indeed for Mutual Edification and Sometimes

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<sup>32</sup> Despite the fact that this part of the letter suggests that singing only occurs in the meetings with children, young people, and servants, in the previous paragraph she mentions singing as a portion of Friday night meetings when various church "Brethren" attend (Norton 525-6). Instead of undermining singing as a pedagogical act, the contrast between these two mentions of singing further highlights that singing, like prayer, had different uses in different groups.

condescend to direct part of conversation to me and so far I bear a part as to answer etc. but no otherway[. . .] That these Gatherings at our House Sir I Imagine no way tend to Separations rents or diversions but are rather a Sweet Sementing bond of union that Holds us together in this critical day[. . .] [T]hey are Sweet refreshing Evenings my resting reaping times and as God Has Gatherd I dare not Scatter. (Norton 525-6)

She insists that on Friday nights she is "by no means" acting as an "instructor." She focuses upon her home as a place to gather and minimizes her presence -- she only speaks when asked a direct question -- and thus puts forward her home instead of herself as the key component of Friday evenings. However, because it is *her* home, *her* domestic space, her words offset her humble intentions and quietly remind the reader that she is the foundation of these meetings even if she is not the vocal leader. When she describes "these Gatherings at our House" as tending to "a Sweet Sementing bond of union that Holds us together in this critical day," her home is the binding glue of a local community of religious worship, and its position as a domestic space in which she is mother, teacher, and wife, suggests that this local community is a family.

Osborn's spiritual care of whites, even as it is markedly different from her work with the Ethiopian society, suggestively confirms her instruction of black Christians. It places all those who attend meetings -- black and white -- in relationship with each other through their relationship to her. Her home has been a nursery for piety where she has birthed a spiritual family composed of adults and children, rich and poor, black and white, men and women, free and enslaved. As the de facto matriarch of God's family in

Newport, her work with each portion of the population iteratively augments the necessity and propriety of her work with the others, including black Christians.

Osborn's ministry to black residents of Newport connects to their vulnerable class. In the case of enslaved persons, their condition as property clearly marks them as outsiders who are not even truly connected to each other (as the case of Phillis and Bobey amply emphasized). And, in the case of free black persons, the color of their skin marks a history of natal alienation that, since gaining freedom, they may have begun to offset but which still isolates them from the white population.<sup>33</sup> Thus, the local black community in Newport was in some ways a motherless population.<sup>34</sup> Through her informal ministry, she repeats her affectionate adoption of Bobey over and over again. She simultaneously provides willing black Christians with a spiritual education, thereby publicly recognizing somewhat of their humanity, and insists upon their childish nature. Through this process, she extends her divine family and maternal authority, as well as spreads her understanding of religious worship to others outside her home.

The seeming contradiction between Osborn's public recognition of black people's spiritual humanity and her childish treatment of them fits well with George Boulukos's study of the transatlantic grateful slave trope used in the long eighteenth century. His argument, which demonstrates that the grateful slave trope helped facilitate the

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<sup>33</sup> As William D. Piersen argues in *Black Yankees*, the unilineal nature of kinship in Africa meant that people of African descent could not simply reinstate kinship ties if they gained freedom in America: "Even if the slaves had been able to return to African kinship forms, such extended familial would have taken generations to rebuild" (87).

<sup>34</sup> My argument in this section is dependent upon Orlando Patterson's definition of slavery. In *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), he describes enslaved persons as "socially dead": "Not only was the slave denied all claims on, and obligations to, his parents and living blood relations but, by extension, all such claims on his more remote ancestors and on his descendants. He was truly a genealogical isolate" (5).

racialization of society, also suggests that acknowledging while circumscribing enslaved people's affective capacities, helps justify white dominance through sentimentalization (7-8).<sup>35</sup> In texts by white authors, enslaved persons' emotions are not truly their own and instead serve the function of supporting their enslavement and marking their difference. Osborn's infantilization of the Ethiopian society's members implies their filial affection. Their filial affection then confirms her divine maternity even as their childish status assures their continued subordination. She claims the powerful affective position of mother and its duties to nurture and care while leaving her black "children" with few avenues of affective expression themselves.

The Newport revival waned along with the decade, but both the female and the Ethiopian societies remained vibrant. Despite Osborn's infantilization of its members during its early years, her intimate and regular involvement with the local black community caused her "to see slavery as morally wrong" (Kujawa 81), just as she came to see the sale of Bobey as wrong.<sup>36</sup> Its members as well as others of African descent, such as Phillis Wheatley who shared her poems with Osborn through her enslaved Newport friend Obour Tanner, would have overflowed the circumscribed boundaries Osborn placed around their spirituality.<sup>37</sup> Once her spiritual maternity had become inflected with affection as a result of Phillis and Bobey, she may have been particularly

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<sup>35</sup> For additional studies of sentimentality and race in the eighteenth century, see Julie Ellison's *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999) and Amit S. Rai's *Rule of Sympathy: Sentiment, Race, and Power 1750-1850* (New York: Palgrave, 2002).

<sup>36</sup> This realization may have occurred after Hopkins became minister.

<sup>37</sup> Kujawa hypothesizes that Osborn is the person who submitted Wheatley's first published poem, "On Messrs Hussey and Coffin," to the *Newport Mercury* in 1767 (83). Wheatley also sent several volumes of her book to Samuel Hopkins, one of which was designated for "Mrs. Mason," Osborn's caretaker in her final years (see Wheatley 151).

susceptible to such a transformation. As the revival waned, Osborn's church began to search for a new minister. Osborn and the female society were instrumental in calling their next minister, Samuel Hopkins, an older man who had studied under Jonathan Edwards.<sup>38</sup> Even when Hopkins was a guest preacher instead of the official minister of the church, he met with the female society, something his predecessor and other Congregationalist leaders had rarely done, despite Osborn's efforts to have regular attendance by a minister. Hopkins also began helping in Osborn's school and with her religious education of the local black population. It appears that he greatly admired her spirituality and depended upon her while serving the Newport Church. For example, she met with Hopkins every Saturday, and they discussed his sermon for the following day.<sup>39</sup> Apparently in introducing him to the local black population and her spiritual education of them, Osborn led him towards a transformation in his stance in regards to slavery (Kujawa 80-1). In 1771, he began preaching against slavery from the pulpit, most likely after discussing his plans with Osborn during their Saturday night meetings, and, in 1776, he published his famous abolitionist pamphlet, *A Dialogue Concerning the Slavery of Africans*.<sup>40</sup>

Though Osborn is the protagonist of this chapter, it is important to note that this

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<sup>38</sup> For Hopkins's memoirs, see Samuel Hopkins, *Sketches of the Life of the Late, Rev. Samuel Hopkins, D.D., Pastor of the First Congregational Church in Newport* (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1805). For a discussion of the relationship between Osborn and Hopkins, see Sheryl A. Kujawa's "'The Path of Duty Plain': Samuel Hopkins, Sarah Osborn, and Revolutionary Newport" in *Rhode Island History* 58.3 (2000), 75-89.

<sup>39</sup> For a discussion of Osborn's and Hopkins's working relationship, see Kujawa 80. As Kujawa notes, there is "little evidence in regards to their conversations"; we do not know when exactly Osborn and Hopkins came to view slavery as morally wrong, but perhaps it was during these conversations that their perhaps latent beliefs became articulated.

<sup>40</sup> There are few extant writings from these final decades of Osborn's life. Due to illness, likely mercury poisoning, she found it difficult to write.

narrative is not hers alone. Through an analysis of the language in Osborn's writings, this series of events -- Osborn's spiritual crisis, her adoption of Bobey and eventually other black Christians, the Newport revivals, and Hopkins's public abolitionism -- can all be traced to Phillis's vocalization of her maternal affection. Thus, this chapter is the story of Osborn and of Phillis. Their shared story reminds us of the unruliness, persistence, and power of emotions. Motherhood, after all, is a primary component of many women's identities. In so deeply integrating her spirituality and her interpersonal engagements with such a fundamental aspect of her self, Osborn had already become vulnerable. When that maternal identity and its careful limits were exposed to Phillis's fierce affection for her son, Osborn lost her control.

Motherhood, as an affective identity that implicates private *and* public concerns, has been an understudied aspect of colonial American life, perhaps because its emotional aspects seem universal and perhaps because, when it does impinge upon public life, it is so easily subsumed to parenthood more generally.<sup>41</sup> Though Linda K. Kerber's identification of Republican motherhood motivated much scholarly discussion of motherhood and its connections to post-Revolutionary American politics,<sup>42</sup> it is time to (re)investigate the colonial period when motherhood, especially in the middle and lower classes, was not yet a primarily domestic and private identity. Osborn capitalized upon

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<sup>41</sup> Jay Fliegelman's *Prodigals and Pilgrims: The American Revolution Against Patriarchal Authority, 1750-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982) is the most obvious and influential example of this latter possibility.

<sup>42</sup> See Chapter 9 of Linda K. Kerber's *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980). For subsequent discussions, see Jan Lewis's "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early American Republic" in *William and Mary Quarterly* 44.4 (1987), 689-721; Ruth Bloch's "The Gendered Meanings of Virtue in Revolutionary America" in *Signs* 13.1 (1987), 37-58; Rosemarie Zagari's "Morals, Manners and the Republican Mother" in *American Quarterly* 44.2 (1992), 192-215; and Chapter 5 in Martha Tomhave Blauvelt's *The Work of the Heart: Young Women and Emotion, 1780-1830* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2007).

her status as a mother to permit a sustained and public engagement with her religious community that never provoked the massive, critical response that its radicalism should have. Just as the seeming naturalness of Phillis's anger forced Osborn to reconsider her decision, the seeming naturalness of Osborn's assumption of maternal authority softly counteracted suggestions of impropriety.

Scholars including George Boulukos, Peter Coviello, and Julie Ellison have described the utility of emotions in defining community as well as excluding and oppressing others on the basis of what is perceived as affective limitations and differences.<sup>43</sup> Though such scholars have identified salient ways in which persons of color have insisted upon the dignity and power of their emotions (or rejected others' dismissal of them as "merely" or overly emotional), Phillis's and Osborn's shared story points to the broader riskiness of crafting communities based upon them. Difficult to classify, difficult to contain, emotions escape boundaries and alter how people feel about themselves, their families and friends, and those, like Phillis, that they seek to discount.

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For Sarah Osborn, intimacy is an extension of the divine relationship. Therefore, it is capaciously extendable and potentially infinite. Because spirituality is so intricately connected to every aspect of her life and identity, she not only has the ability to provide her intimates with her religious views but her relationships to others alter her perception

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<sup>43</sup> See Boulukos; Peter Coviello's *Intimacy in America: Dreams of Affiliation in Antebellum Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); and Julie Ellison's *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).



of herself and the world around her, often in unforeseen and uncontrollable ways. The semi-public community that arises as she humbly (but indomitably) proselytizes her spiritual vision to others centers upon the tenets of evangelicalism. Because it retains God as its foundation and her as his agent (authorized through a spiritual marriage), she revises Newport's public religious life and instantiates a community that, while tiered, admits those who are often excluded based upon race, class, age, and denomination. She brings communal religious worship into her home, thereby making her emergent public authority a natural extension of her "private" maternal identity. For Phillis, intimacy is largely uncontrollable as she is forced into relationships not of her own choosing and even her connection to her son is subject to the whims and actions of others. Yet it is precisely through her intimate relationships that she perhaps profoundly shaped the communities around her.

The next chapter centers upon the elegies of Phillis Wheatley, another enslaved African and a poet who likely knew Osborn and even perhaps this other Phillis. For Wheatley, intimacy is fodder for poetic inspiration and authorization. In the wake of death, she crafts elegies that seek to console the grief of mourning family members. Thus intimate relationships suffuse her writing, but it is not these familial ones onto which she grafts herself. Instead, her elegies designate a poetic persona that is aligned with her dead subjects. Indeed, this next chapter will point to the ways that intimacy can be used to create fictive communities and the ways that those fictive communities revise public life.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Phillis Wheatley and Forgetting to Mourn

Enslaved colonial American poet Phillis Wheatley has style, an elegiac style that is. Almost without fail, she depicts her subjects soaring to their new celestial home. She praises death as an end to pain. She exhorts her audience to cease grieving and to celebrate the loved one's arrival in heaven. She offers the consolation that her readers will one day die themselves and experience the liberating bliss of death. Wheatley wrote at least twenty-seven elegies, most on behalf of acquaintances, several for figures famous within or to her Boston community, and all for white people. The nineteen extant examples share some, if not all, of the above features as well as occasional others such as an opening lament on death's inevitability.<sup>1</sup> She is so methodical that one critic, Gregory Rigsby, has even gone so far as to call it the Wheatley elegiac form.<sup>2</sup>

Wheatley's consistency as an elegist provides us with a critical opportunity because it suggests that her elegies make a consistent argument about death and her relationship to it. "To a LADY and her Children, on the Death of her Son and their Brother" is an elegy that hints at that argument. The poem appears in Wheatley's only

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<sup>1</sup> One possible exception is "On the Death of Mr. Snider Murder'd by Richardson" (Wheatley 77-8). This elegy was perhaps the only one written about a person she had never met and/or whose family she had no contact with.

<sup>2</sup> See Gregory Rigsby's "Form and Content in Phillis Wheatley's Elegies" in *CLA Journal* 9.4 (1975), 248-57.

published book, *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral*, which was issued by a London press in 1773 after she was unable to find a willing printer in America. Though the subjects and families of most of her other elegies have been identified, in this instance we only know the name of the titular lady: Mrs. Boylston.<sup>3</sup>

In the poem, the author describes the difference between the mother's and her dead son's experience of death:

Th' unhappy mother sees the sanguine rill  
Forget to flow, and nature's wheels stand still,  
But see from earth his spirit far remov'd,  
And know no grief recals your best-belov'd:  
He, upon pinions swifter than the wind,  
Has left mortality's sad scenes behind  
For joys to this terrestrial state unknown,  
And glories richer than the monarch's crown.  
Of virtue's steady course the prize behold!  
What blissful wonders to his mind unfold! (44)

These lines depict death as an upward flight on "pinions," or feathered wings, from mortal earth into "blissful" skies. We can imagine the "[s]ad scenes" of life becoming small and insignificant, and "virtue's" "prize" growing ever more apparent as the deceased ascends. When Wheatley exhilaratingly declares, "What blissful wonders to his mind unfold!," she likens the first sight of a virtuous life's reward to the "wond[rous]"

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<sup>3</sup> We know the lady's name because Wheatley included it in her 1772 proposal. See Wheatley 166.

expansion of the "mind." In contrast, the mother's world narrows while her son dies. Caught up in her unhappiness, she watches as the blood ceases its "flow" in the "sanguine rill" of his veins and as his body's "wheels stand still." Seeking to console Mrs. Boylston, Wheatley directs her to look up and see her son's "spirit far remov'd" from earth. She reminds Mrs. Boylston that the son now "recal[l]s" "no grief" and that "no grief" will "recal[l]" him back to life.

After extending this message of solace to Mrs. Boylston, her remaining children, and other mourners, Wheatley abruptly changes course at the end of the above stanza. In a couplet that appears to be something of an aside, she writes, "But of celestial joys I sing in vain: / Attempt not, muse, the too advent'rous strain" (44). As if in response, the next stanza, the final one of the poem, abandons its airy images of death and directs her audience to stop mourning:

No more in briny show'rs, ye friends around,  
Or bathe his clay, or waste them on the ground:  
Still do you weep, still wish for his return?  
How cruel thus to wish, and thus to mourn? (44)

Going beyond the recurrent calls for resignation found in many of the period's discussions of death, her words appear scornful in their classification of tearful expressions as impractical longings for the return of the dead. They also underscore the ambiguity of her direction to the muse in the previous stanza. Is it "in vain" to "sing" of "celestial joys" because she cannot describe them or because her audience cannot comprehend them? Is her "strain" "too advent'rous" because she does not have the skill

to provide the message of consolation that the muse inspires her to write or because her grieving audience is insensible to a message of comfort? Where does the problem reside, with her or her readers?

In this chapter I will contend that the answer to the last question is both. Wheatley's elegies will always be "in vain" because she and her audience are members of two different communities distinguished by their relationship to death. The members of her audience, like the mother in the poem and unlike her subjects, have not yet experienced the transformative process of death. Because they are living, they are incapable of grasping what the dead know about life and the afterlife and, by extension, Wheatley's message of consolation. Instead, they are trapped by an excess of grief. Thus Wheatley's elegies establish two separate communities: one transcendent, epistemic, and dead, and the other earthbound, affective, and alive. Wheatley herself has undergone death-through-enslavement, crossing the Atlantic in metaphorical and even perhaps literal "pinions," though hers took the form of iron fetters instead of feathered wings.<sup>4</sup> She, through the authorial persona crafted in her elegies, is aligned with the community of the dead.

As I will show, the effect of the poetic establishment of these communities is twofold. The first effect is that it resists the racialized dismissal of Wheatley's poetry as the outpourings of a grateful slave.<sup>5</sup> As a young African woman who was enslaved as a girl off the Senegambian coast of Africa and transported to Boston, Wheatley was (and

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<sup>4</sup> See *OED* pinion *n.*<sup>2</sup>, definitions I and II.6.

<sup>5</sup> Here, I refer to George Boulukos's book, *The Grateful Slave*. See my discussion of that book in Chapter 2.

remains) a symbol of loss to her readers. As such, she was able to facilitate her eighteenth-century white audience's emotional transactions, especially when writing elegies on behalf of others.<sup>6</sup> Throughout, however, Wheatley maintains her epistemic and affective dissimilarity to her audience even as she offers consolation. Thus, she proclaims her sensibility but not her sentimentality. The second effect of the poetic establishment of these two communities is that it offers a parallel consolation to her black audience. Because she depicts herself as choosing to find transcendence instead of bereavement in her enslavement and denies that transcendence to her white readers while they live, Wheatley proposes that other enslaved Africans can make similar choices and join her and the community of the dead. This second effect suggests that Wheatley's elegies speak to those of African descent in ways that do not register with or are not available to her eighteenth-century white readers. It also suggests that analyses of Wheatley's verse must be attentive to her multiple audiences -- for the purposes of this chapter, her named addressees, Boston's and the region's white readers, free and enslaved black persons in America, and even her self -- and be prepared to identify simultaneous and even seemingly contradictory interpretations.<sup>7</sup>

Note that the community of the dead depicted in Wheatley's elegies is *primarily* epistemic, not *only* epistemic. Like its living counterpart, members of this community experience emotion. In the first place, the acquisition of divine knowledge is an occasion for joy, and heaven is blissful. Moreover, the sight of grief touches the dead, and, if

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<sup>6</sup> In viewing Wheatley's poetry as a medium through which white early Americans transacted in grief, I am grateful to Joanna Brooks for conversation and for sharing her work. See Brooks's "Our Phillis, Ourselves," forthcoming in *American Literature*.

<sup>7</sup> Of course, Wheatley's elegies have more than just these audiences, especially when one considers her book's publication in London. However, this project has a local scope.

possible, they wish to console those they have left behind. When I refer to Wheatley's proclamation of sensibility instead of sentimentality, it is this aspect of her elegiac argument that I underscore. Sentimentality suggests the earthliness and (over)abundance of the living community's emotion just as sensibility suggests the contrasting control and spiritual purity of Wheatley's. The types and amounts of emotions that the living feel are such that affect impedes their relationship to the divine. Conversely, the dead feel the proper emotions in the proper amounts. Their death has brought them knowledge about the divine and about how best to feel.

My argument closely engages with several critical texts. In approaching Wheatley's enslavement as a form of death, I am drawing upon the field-transforming definition of slavery as social death and natal alienation proposed by Orlando Patterson.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, I see this chapter as at least partially a response to April C. E. Langley's *The Black Aesthetic Unbound: Theorizing the Dilemma of Eighteenth-Century African American Literature* and Katherine Clay Bassard's *Spiritual Interrogations: Culture, Gender, and Community in Early African American Women's Writing*. These two scholars explore representations of death in Wheatley's writing and view them as expressive of personal grief. Addressing Wheatley's elegies, Bassard asserts that they are a form of "self-ventriloquism" in which the author "desire[s] to speak beyond the 'grave' of separation to those she left behind for a 'better' world" (70). Similarly, Langley primarily views the elegiac neoclassical ode, "NIOBE in Distress for her children slain by APOLLO," as an autobiographical articulation of mourning for "her African roots" (64).

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<sup>8</sup> See *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982).

Though both women crucially and persuasively connect Wheatley's grief to a poetics of recovery and a genealogy of African American literature and community, neither sufficiently attends to how we can understand Wheatley as empowered through grief when her poetry so unequivocally depicts bereavement as debilitating. Thus, this chapter seeks to supplement their contentions by underscoring that while we should not ignore the subtext of personal sorrow that her poems contain, the elegies' more direct portrayal of Wheatley as detached from grief and aligned with the knowledgeable community of the dead enriches our understanding of the consolatory message and invitation that she extends to her black audience.

For the remainder of the chapter, I first discuss the place of mourning and elegies in New England, its black community, and Wheatley scholarship. Second, I turn to Wheatley's biblical paraphrases in order to indicate where I do see her expressing personal emotion in her writings. Third, I analyze Wheatley's elegies. I focus primarily upon her funeral elegies written for local acquaintances, especially those about children. In taking up the subject of dead family members, these elegies register as more intimate at the outset than those written about famous personages. They also provide us with a less obstructed ability to observe her relationship to grief since she is unable, as in the case of dignitaries, to obscure the issue with statements concerning social (instead of personal) loss. I connect these poems to her establishment of the two communities, one living and one dead, and to a message of consolation and invitation that she extends to her black audience. Only verse written before her emancipation following the publication of *Poems on Various Subjects* is dealt with here since my argument



fundamentally depends upon her identification as an enslaved person. Wheatley gained her freedom after returning from London and publishing her book. I conclude by addressing what I see as the limits being aligned with a community of the dead. Wheatley's portrayal of herself as transcendent over mundane emotions, especially grief, may create an authoritative poetic persona, but sorrow is seldom entirely restrained.

*Elegies, Phillis Wheatley, and the Black Atlantic*

The examination of death and grief has been a fruitful avenue for research into the effects of enslavement within colonial and postcolonial America. Joseph Roach, Sharon Holland, Karla F. C. Holloway, Anissa Janine Wardi, and Dana Luciano, among others, have all addressed this topic.<sup>9</sup> They view enslaved Africans' loss of home and kinship ties to be simultaneously an irrecoverable trauma and a shared experience that provides them and their descendants with an affective bond through which to reconstitute community, especially when participating in the formal and informal rituals surrounding death. For example, Roach examines the African American mortuary culture of nineteenth-century New Orleans and determines that the "occasion created by death offered this community an opportunity to affirm its semiautonomous but discreetly submerged existence within or against the obligatory rituals of the better publicized fiction called the dominant culture" (60). As this quotation from Roach suggests, for all

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<sup>9</sup> See Joseph Roach's *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), especially chapters 2 and 3; Sharon Patricia Holland's *Raising the Dead: Readings of Death and (Black) Subjectivity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000); Karla F. C. Holloway's *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Anissa Janine Wardi's *Death and the Arc of Mourning in African American Literature* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003); and Dana Luciano's *Arranging Grief: Sacred Time and the Body in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), especially chapter 4.

of these scholars texts and performances relating to bereavement are sites through which to recover some of the beginnings and forms of African Americans' communal reconstitutions.

In eighteenth-century Boston, mortuary practices for black and white deaths were similar, especially by the end of the century when the black population had become largely Christianized.<sup>10</sup> Bells tolled to announce the funeral. After women had prepared the body, it was carried through the streets in a procession that involved friends and family and that ended at the graveside. Processions for notable communal figures, both black and white, could be especially elaborate (and long). Songs and prayers were made, and loved ones tossed handfuls of dirt over the coffin or shrouded corpse. Grave goods -- pottery, coins, plates of salt -- were placed above and below ground, and markers such as headstones and footstones were added after the burials. Funerals could be expensive affairs with the deceased's family providing food and drink, sometimes alcoholic, and, in the case of a white individual's death, gloves as invitations.

There were some differences between black and white interments, chiefly in terms of their tone and meaning. Though both white and black bodies were typically buried supine in an east-west axis, for those of African descent, this orientation may have

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<sup>10</sup> Rural black populations, found mostly on Southern plantations, tended to retain African funerary practices much longer. See Jamieson 52. For discussions of early American funerary practices that relate to New England, see Margaret Coffin's *Death in Early America: The History and Folklore of Customs and Superstitions of Early Medicine, Funerals, Burials, and Mourning* (Nashville: Nelson, 1976); Edwin Dethlefsen's and James Deetz's "Death's Heads, Cherubs, and Willow Trees" in *Passing: The Vision of Death in America*, edited by Charles O. Jackson (Westport: Greenwood, 1977), 48-59; Robert K. Fitts's *Inventing New England's Slave Paradise: Master/Slave Relations in Eighteenth-Century Narragansett, Rhode Island* (New York: Garland, 1998), 157-62; Jamieson; Piersen 75-78; and Robert V. Wells's "A Tale of Two Cities: Epidemics and Rituals of Death in Eighteenth-Century Boston and Philadelphia" in *Mortal Remains: Death in Early America*, edited by Nancy Isenberg and Andrew Burstein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 56-67.

represented the "common African associations of life and death with the path of the sun" as well as western and/or Christian influence" (Jamieson 53).<sup>11</sup> Often believing that death meant "return to the ancestral continent," black mourners would dance during their brethren's funerals; they were "merr[y]" instead of solemn, as in the case of their white and perhaps devout Christian black counterparts (Piersen 77). Black burials were celebratory enough to offend many white persons' sensibilities. In 1721, Boston's selectmen ordered that only "one Tolling of a Bell" would be allowed for "Indian, Negro or Molatto" funerals (as opposed to the two tolls permitted for white funerals) and further determined that persons of color should be "Carried the nearest way to their Graues [sic]" (*Report* 88). In 1735, Boston's selectmen instructed the city's sextons to warn "Inhabitants" that they would be "Preventing and Reforming Disorders at the Funerals of Negroes," in accord with the law (*Report* 283).<sup>12</sup> Black bodies were usually interred in potter's fields (as in the case of Wheatley) or in segregated portions of church burial grounds, though as urban populations increased, burials moved to large town cemeteries.<sup>13</sup>

One additional difference between black and white burials is that elegies were often a component of the mourning rituals surrounding a white person's death. An elegy might be read at the graveside or during the funeral; copies were frequently distributed to mourners and even placed atop the coffin before it was covered in earth. Yet, though

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<sup>11</sup> Eighteenth-century Christian burials typically had an east-west orientation so that the deceased could rise up and face Christ on Judgment Day.

<sup>12</sup> For a brief discussion of these two laws, see Piersen 77-78.

<sup>13</sup> Due to its rediscovery in 1991, New York's colonial African Burial Ground is the most studied black urban cemetery. See, for example, Joyce Hansen's and Gary McGowan's *Breaking Ground, Breaking Silence: The Story of New York's African Burial Ground* (New York: Henry Holt, 1998).

black people were not the subjects of elegies, black people wrote elegies. The genre is an underexamined avenue via which persons of color approached death as a site of communal reconstitution.<sup>14</sup> In choosing this form, black authors appropriated a flexible and primarily social genre to write about others' losses even as their own were frequently taboo topics and lacked the same specificity of memory. As Max Cavitch writes in his admirable and ambitious *American Elegy: The Poetry of Mourning from the Puritans to Whitman*, "An occasional form, commonly devoted to detailing its' subjects lives and connections, elegy sometimes helped to restore a sense of the severed affiliations from which blacks suffered disproportionately" (180).<sup>15</sup> He indicates that black elegists writing for or on behalf of whites would often omit particularizing details about their subjects in order to "make room for the indirect expression of [their] own uncompleted mourning" (184). Due to the highly circulated nature of elegies -- they were read aloud in homes, at churches, and at gravesides as well as published in broadsides and periodicals -- non-literate as well as literate blacks could imagine themselves as members of a black elegiac community that remained indistinct to the white society around them.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, elegies by black authors would confirm their white audience as a community united by grief, text, memory, and spirituality, and closed to the black author

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<sup>14</sup> For examples of early African American elegies in addition to those by Wheatley, see Lucy Terry's "Bars Fight" (1746); George Moses Horton's (1797-1880) "Death of an Old Carriage Horse" and "Death of Gen. Jackson--An Eulogy"; James Monroe Whitfield's "To Cinque" (1853); and Ann Plato's "Reflections, Written on Visiting the Grave of a Venerated Friend" and "I Have No Brother" (1841). For another interesting juxtaposition, see Jupiter Hammon's "A Poem for Children with Thoughts on Death" (1782).

<sup>15</sup> Cavitch particularly cites Wheatley's poetry as an exemplar of this facet of African-American elegies, and he contends that her poetry's presence in African-American periodicals in the nineteenth century link her to a black elegiac tradition (195).

<sup>16</sup> For a brief discussion of elegies' circulation, see Henson 11.

and other persons of color.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, black-authored elegies could simultaneously affirm two communities, one white and one black.

Black authors' tendency towards writing departicularized elegies is somewhat distinctive in early American literature. The early American elegiac tradition, especially in New England where Wheatley wrote, emerges primarily from the Puritan funeral sermon. As Robert Henson comments in his concise essay on the form, these elegies are for the most part "built upon the two elements of portraiture and exhortation" (12).<sup>18</sup>

Authors use their descriptions of the subject's life to admonish their audience and urge its members to follow in the deceased's footsteps. Though these portraits are in many ways generic, emphasizing the saintly and exemplary over the mundane, they underscore their subjects' existence as real people by providing the names of the deceased and other details about their lives, survivors, and dying moments. Such details about the deceased allow the author to mourn and to express something of the loss felt upon the occasion of a

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<sup>17</sup> The double audience for Wheatley's elegies is important to note. As Roach asserts, "The key to understanding how performance worked *within* a culture [ . . . ] is to illuminate the process of surrogation as it operated *between* the participating cultures. The key, in other words, is to understand how circum-Atlantic societies, confronted with revolutionary circumstances for which few precedents existed, have invented themselves by performing their pasts in the presence of others" (5).

<sup>18</sup> Here, I limit my discussion of the form to the Puritan funeral elegy since that appears to be the main tradition within which Wheatley wrote. For a more developed analysis, see Jeffrey Hammond's *The American Puritan Elegy: A Literary and Cultural Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Also see William J. Scheick's "Tombless Virtue and Hidden Text: New England Puritan Funeral Elegies" in *Puritan Poets and Poetics: Seventeenth-Century American Poetry in Theory and Practice*, edited by Peter White (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1985), 286-302. However, many other scholars have analyzed the form. For a discussion of American elegies through Walt Whitman, see Cavitch. For a discussion of feminism and elegies, see Celeste M. Schenck's "Feminism and Deconstruction: Re-Constructing the Elegy" in *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature* 5.1 (1986): 13-27. For treatments of eighteenth-century women authors and elegies, see Judith Hawley's "Charlotte Smith's *Elegiac Sonnets*: Losses and Gains" in *Women's Poetry in the Enlightenment: The Making of a Canon, 1730-1820*, eds. Isobal Armstrong and Virginia Blain (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1999), 184-98, and Chapter 7: "The Elegy" in Paula Backscheider's *Eighteenth-Century Women Poets and Their Poetry: Inventing Agency, Inventing Genre* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005), 268-315. For a broad treatment of the elegiac form, see Sacks.

death while the exhortatory elements help contain the grief by urging a virtuous life and resignation to God's will. These poems often praise death as the work of God, a moment when God gathers a soul, and the authors of elegies will even anticipate their own deaths when they too shall ascend to heaven.<sup>19</sup> The pious urgings found in Puritan funeral elegies are a subset of the cultural commentary to which elegies more generally, long a popular and flexible form, have been traditionally well-suited.<sup>20</sup> In downplaying the element of portraiture while retaining the exhortation, black elegists subtly revise the Puritan subgenre without secularizing it.

In addition to being departicularized in terms of details about the deceased's life and dying moments, Wheatley's elegies are departicularized in terms of the author's emotional state. Expressions of authorial grief are a mainstay of elegies, and connect to the audience's belief in their sincerity. By the eighteenth-century, the pastoral mode, long the preferred format, was no longer in vogue since having shepherds voice sorrow seemed ridiculous to many and diminished confidence in the author's emotional honesty (Sacks 118-19; D. S. Shields *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* 224). Moreover, elegies' popularity caused many enlightened wits to deride what they saw as the triteness of most funeral elegies, an opinion famously and humorously articulated by Benjamin Franklin in the guise of Silence Dogood.<sup>21</sup> The solution for an author such as Wheatley, who wished to memorialize the dead with artistry and piety but avoid seeming

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<sup>19</sup> See for example Edward Taylor's poem "Upon Wedlock, & Death of Children."

<sup>20</sup> As Backscheider succinctly observes, "Elegies for poets provided good places for critical observations" (275).

<sup>21</sup> See the June 15, 1722, issue of the *New-England Courant* for Silence Dogood's "A RECEIPT to make a New-England Funeral Elegy." Cavitch reminds us that such public critique of elegies would not be necessary if there were not many who believed in the power and utility of the form. See *American Elegy* 38.

clichéd or false, was to invest the plain style of the Puritan funeral elegy with a sense of the religious sublime, a practice followed by such authors as Elizabeth Singer Rowe, a Briton, as well as Boston's own Mather Byles and Benjamin Colman.<sup>22</sup> In this tradition, elegies include expansive descriptions of heaven, rely upon biblical typology, and trace the divine plan behind earthly and natural events even as they detail the exemplary Christian lives of the deceased and the magnitude of the loss felt by the deceased's community and memorialist.<sup>23</sup> However, even here, Wheatley distinguishes herself by depersonalizing and thus deparicularizing her elegies. She depicts others mourning, but rarely portrays herself as personally sharing that sense of loss, except when she figures the loss as societal instead of individual as in the case of the deaths of dignitaries. She reminds her readers that they too may someday die and go to heaven, but does not anticipate her own afterlife. Indeed, she rejoices in death abstractly even as she offers consolation and spiritual instruction.

Because Wheatley's elegies frequently celebrate heavenly freedom and joy, and represent death as a release for her readers and subjects, examinations have typically addressed what many see as their emancipatory message. For example, in "Style as Protest in the Poetry of Phillis Wheatley," James A. Levernier views Wheatley's funeral elegies as centrally concerned with "freedom," a focus which governs their "form and intent" (175-76). Similarly, John C. Shields views Wheatley's contemplative elegies as primarily concerned with freedom. He remarks, "[T]he goal of her elegiac mediations

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<sup>22</sup> David S. Shields cites Benjamin Colman's *A Poem on Elijahs Translation, Occasion'd by the Death of the Reverend and Learned Mr. Samuel Willard* (1707) as the first exemplar of this revised elegiac subgenre. See D. S. Shields 224-26.

<sup>23</sup> See for example Rowe's

was to discover a realm wherein men did not enslave their black brothers and sisters; in other words, she sought better men and a better state or condition of being" (246).<sup>24</sup> The emancipatory message in Wheatley's elegies connects directly to her use of biblical imagery and references to Christian spirituality. That she does so places her squarely amongst other authors of color writing in early America. As Joanna Brooks powerfully argues in *American Lazarus: Religion and the Rise of African-American and Native American Literatures*, eighteenth-century evangelical Christianity's "religious formulas such as conversion, revival, and resurrection answered the alienating and mortifying effects of slavery, colonialism, and racial oppression" (9). Through religious exhortations in her elegies, Wheatley extends the spiritual message she has received through her evangelical education and exhorts her audience -- black and white -- about slavery.

Though the exploration of the emancipatory message within Wheatley's elegies has been a productive conversation, the exploration of affect has been largely absent. This absence is surprising since, by their very nature as an affective genre, her elegies would seem to offer a plethora of moments for the examination of emotion. Yet, perhaps due to her Christian message of salvation and her precise focus upon white subjects and

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<sup>24</sup> For another scholarly examination of her elegies and their message of freedom, see Gordon E. Thompson's "Methodism and the Consolation of Heavenly Bliss in Phillis Wheatley's Funeral Elegies" in *CLA Journal* 48.1 (2004), 34-50. Also see Cedric May's *Evangelism and Resistance in the Black Atlantic, 1600-1835* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008). Since Wheatley wrote during the late eighteenth century, scholars have connected her emancipatory message in her elegies and other writings to the larger American and Atlantic revolutionary climates. Betsy Erkkila, for example, draws a connection between the metaphor of slavery in the American Revolution and Wheatley's poetry. Though she indicates that Wheatley's readers may not have heeded her voice then, she believes it was the beginning of a racial revolution fomented by a political one. See "Phillis Wheatley and the Black American Revolution" in *A Mixed Race: Ethnicity in Early America*, ed. Frank Shuffelton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 225-40.



mourners, many contemporary readers have found her elegies to be emotionless and formulaic. With the exception of Katharine Clay Bassard, who views Wheatley's elegies as expressive of isolation (64), scholars generally have turned to her other writings to unearth the connections between emotion and the content and power of her poetry.<sup>25</sup> Their work clearly indicates that for Wheatley, as Peter Coviello succinctly and elegantly writes, "affect is, if not indispensable, enormously potent" ("Agonizing Affection: Affect and Nation in Early America" 443). Because I find such arguments persuasive and because elegies are by their nature affective texts, this chapter seeks to examine the understudied emotional potency of Wheatley's elegies.

There are some risks to conjecturing about Wheatley's relationship to affect through the analysis of non-autobiographical writings. On the one hand, due to the horrific trauma that chattel slavery enacted upon countless Africans and due to the constraints we imagine Wheatley felt as an enslaved black woman, it is tempting to overread all expressions of loss and grief in her poetry as expressions of *her* loss and grief. On the other hand, due to her silence on the subject of her personal losses,<sup>26</sup> it is equally dangerous to dismiss her elegies as uninspired and flat. In an attempt to avoid both these interpretive dangers, I begin with the assumption that the departicularization of her elegies is significant. The assumption that this formal aspect is significant seems

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<sup>25</sup> See for example Chapter 4: "Female Authorship, Public Fancy" of Julie Ellison's *Cato's Tears and the Making of Anglo-American Emotion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Astrid Franke's "Phillis Wheatley, Melancholy Muse" in *New England Quarterly* 77.2 (2004): 224-51; and Jennifer Thorn's "'All Beautiful in Woe': Gender, Nation, and Phillis Wheatley's 'Niobe'" in *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* 37 (2008): 233-58.

<sup>26</sup> There are several notable exceptions, such as her reference to her father in "To the Right Honourable WILLIAM, Earl of DARTMOUTH, His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for North-America, &c." (39-40) and her letters to John Thornton and Obour Tanner regarding Susannah Wheatley's death (153-56, 158-60). None of these writings are elegies, though I briefly address one elegiac letter at the end of the chapter.

logical since Wheatley was adept at adapting her style to the poetic genre and topic, skillful at adding precise and evocative details in many non-elegies, and widely read.<sup>27</sup>

My assumption increases the importance of even tiny details and word choices, and necessitates close and precise readings. This assumption also implies that thematic and linguistic repetitions are not merely moments in which Wheatley relied upon formula and in which she may have feigned emotion,<sup>28</sup> but are also points upon which she insists. Based upon this methodological approach, it seems clear that Wheatley does not figure herself as emotional and bereaved in her elegies. Rather, her elegies affirm her as a member of the community of the dead, knowledgeable about heaven, transcendent over earthly concerns, released from her body, and transformed by experience.

*Wheatley's "forceful pebble[s]": Anger and Alienation in the Biblical Paraphrases*

Before turning to her elegies, I examine some of her other writings in order to identify sites where her authorial persona is affective. I do so for two reasons. First, I do not wish this chapter to suggest that Wheatley did not have feelings of loss and grief as a result of her enslavement. In locating those feelings in her other writings, namely her biblical paraphrases, this section clarifies that the privileging of knowledge over affect in her elegies is a sign of her authorial precision and control. Second, I believe that doing so suggests why her elegies create two separate communities. Though her adoptive

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<sup>27</sup> Wheatley was especially familiar with the works of John Milton and Alexander Pope, her two favorite authors.

<sup>28</sup> I use the word "feigned" because the unspoken assumption amongst Wheatley scholars appears to be that Wheatley felt little grief or sadness over the death and grief of the white people for whom and about whom she wrote her elegies. Those moments when she laments death and pain amongst the community that enslaved her, therefore, are typically analyzed as pragmatic displays instead of honest expressions of personal grief.

religion offered an emancipatory promise, that promise remained continually deferred to enslaved persons in colonial America. Her biblical translations were places where she could write about divine retribution towards those who distorted God's message of love and acceptance to the faithful. They show that Wheatley's creation of two communities in her elegies underlines her spiritual integrity. Her elegies not only admit her dissimilarity to and isolation from her white audience, but also declare her authority over it as a voice whose knowledge makes her superior.

In her poetry, Wheatley clearly understands religion as a tool through which to claim her humanity amidst a culture that often refused to see it. The poem which made her reputation, "AN ELEGIAC POEM, On the DEATH of that celebrated DIVINE, and eminent Servant of Jesus Christ, the late Reverend, and pious GEORGE WHITEFIELD,"<sup>29</sup> highlights that at least a portion of Whitefield's acclaim is deserved because of his inclusion of black persons in his message:

Take HIM, "my dear AMERICANS," he said,  
Be your complaints in his kind bosom laid:  
Take HIM ye *Africans*, he longs for you;  
Impartial SAVIOUR, is his title due;  
If you will chuse to walk in grace's road,  
You shall be sons, and kings, and priests to GOD. (114)

In these lines, Wheatley remembers the English Whitefield as one who called for Americans and Africans to join with him in a religious community engaged in the loving

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<sup>29</sup> I quote from the earliest extant version of the poem, the one she published as a broadside in 1770. See Wheatley 113-15.

worship of Christ. She suggests that his call has been partially answered in the next stanza when she declares, "Great Countess, we *Americans* revere / Thy name, and thus condole thy grief sincere" (114). Where previously Americans and Africans retained separate identities, now, through the use of the first person "we" and its indication that she, an African, is also an American, she conflates the two. The salvation that Whitefield preached and that Wheatley learned offers hope to her and other black persons that they can "be sons, and kings, and priests to God." In Wheatley's view, religion provides a route towards more than a portion of what white people have already claimed; black persons' share is equal to that of others.

Despite religion's offer of freedom to people of color, it was a deferred promise. Even the fact that Wheatley had to utilize Whitefield's voice in order to proclaim Christ's "[i]mpartial" message of salvation, instead of using her own direct comments, indicates her awareness that her belief in and desire for freedom did not translate into earthly emancipation. While many have suggested the ironic and detached ways in which Wheatley addresses something of this issue in her often sedate, neoclassical poetry,<sup>30</sup> I would argue that her two biblical paraphrases indicate violent anger about the continued enslavement and social alienation of persons of color. Though these two poems, "GOLIATH of GATH" and "Isaiah lxiii. 1-8," have received scant critical examination, they are moments in which she directly interprets religion. While this is, of course, part of biblical paraphrase's purpose, her use of this form should indicate to scholars both the

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<sup>30</sup> For examples, see Sondra O'Neale's "A Slave's Subtle War: Phillis Wheatley's Use of Biblical Myth and Symbol." *Early American Literature* 21.2 (1986): 144-65 and Daniel P. Black's "Literary Subterfuge: Early African American Writing and the Trope of the Mask" in *CLA Journal* 48.4 (2005): 387-403.

importance of these passages to Wheatley and their importance to our understanding of her spiritual beliefs. William J. Scheick, in one of the few sustained analyses of these poems, similarly believes that these poems may contain a "displacement of her anger toward those who have enslaved her race" (125). Here, my intention is to reread these poems in order to emphasize their violent anger and to situate that rage alongside a discussion of her treatment of grief.

"GOLIATH of GATH" retells the story of David's defeat of Goliath with only a slingshot and some stones. Goliath is the champion of the Philistines and therefore a heathen in the eyes of the Israelites, whom the Philistines have come to defeat and enslave. He offers the Israelites and their king, Saul, a chance to avoid battle if they will choose a champion themselves and settle the war through a single contest between the powerful Goliath and their champion. David, the humble shepherd and Jesse's youngest son, volunteers and finds fortification and courage in his belief that God will be on his side since Goliath, who does not worship the same deity, has invaded God's chosen land. No one, at least initially, has faith in David's ability to win. His brother tells him to "back in safety from the field depart" (21). Saul asks him, "Dar'st thou a stripling go, / And venture combat with so great a foe?" (22). Goliath "disdain[s]" him and predicts that "beasts and birds of prey" will "devour" his "flesh" (23). Yet David, secure in his position not only as Israel's but also as God's champion, saves his own disdain for Goliath and returns Goliath's taunt:

The fate you threaten shall your own become,  
And beasts shall be your animated tomb,

That all the earth's inhabitants may know

That there's a God, who governs all below[.] (24)

Here, Wheatley offers a vision of a future in which God's plan will be installed on earth; God will no longer permit the mighty to oppress or commit violence against the righteous. The punishment to those who have denied God and attempted to enslave his people will be a restless death, one in which they are forced to roam the earth in pieces, imprisoned forever within the dark bowels of animals.<sup>31</sup>

Turning to a description of the actual contest between David and Goliath, Wheatley appears to revel in the opportunity to depict a bloody revenge:

And now the youth the forceful pebble flung,  
*Philistia* trembled as it whizz'd along:  
In his dread forehead, where the helmet ends,  
Just o'er the brows the well-aim'd stone descends,  
It pierc'd the skull, and shatter'd all the brain,  
Prone on his face he tumbled to the plain:  
*Goliath's* fall no smaller terror yields  
Than riving thunders in aerial fields:  
The soul still ling'ring in its lov'd abode,  
Till conq'ring *David* o'er the giant strode:  
*Goliath's* sword then laid its master dead,  
And from the body hew'd the ghastly head;

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<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, this image suggests the Middle Passage.

The blood in gushing torrents drench'd the plains,

The soul found passage through the spouting veins. (24)

Wheatley elaborates graphically on the original Bible verses from the first book of Samuel. She imagines details such as a "shatter'd" brain, a "ling[ering]" soul, "gushing torrents" of blood that "drench" "the plains," and the departure of Goliath's soul through his "spouting veins." No longer depicted as a "stripling," David strides "o'er the giant" and lifts what must be a heavy and mighty sword in order to unequivocally indicate his victory by cutting off his opponent's head. As William J. Scheick has noted in his analysis of this poem, Wheatley "may have found the biblical David appealing as a poet of divine favor whose distinctive skin pigmentation made him, as it were, a marked minority figure among his people" (124).<sup>32</sup> In having the minority figure violently act out the arrival of God's will on earth, Wheatley identifies the outsider as the harbinger of justice and deliverance.<sup>33</sup>

The closing lines of the poem, in which Saul "[c]onfer[s] riches and the royal bride" and announces "Knit to my soul for ever thou remain / With me, nor quit my regal roof again" (25), are not paraphrased from 1 Samuel 17 as the rest of the poem is.

Wheatley's contemporaries would have most likely recalled that, in actuality, Saul tried to avoid providing the promised rewards, attempted to have David killed, and generally

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<sup>32</sup> Scheick is referring to the fact that David is one of the sole persons in the Bible to be termed of "ruddy" or reddish complexion. See 1 Samuel 16:12 and 1 Samuel 17:42. The word ruddy is used twice more in the Bible. See Song of Solomon 5:10 and Lamentations 4:7.

<sup>33</sup> The fact that the victory includes the post-contest slaughter of the fleeing Philistines may indicate to some that her fantasy depends upon the destruction of a heathen population not unlike unchristianized Africans and the Americas' indigenous peoples. Yet the fact that she first places the Philistines in the role of oppressors-to-be, instead of oppressed, somewhat negates this parallel and shifts the emphasis to David's manifestation of physical prowess and divine favor, attributes which added to his already positive court reputation as a poet and musician.

resented David's favored status with his own people, his son, and his God. By concluding in such a way, Wheatley ends on a note of harmony. The outsider who delivers his community through violence and acts as an instrument of God's justice gains a new home, family, and wealth. Thus, the outsider is both absorbed into the community and marked as distinctive. Poetically, Wheatley provides David with the opportunity and the rewards she may desire for herself and other enslaved persons: the transformation of earth into an actualization of God's message, a moment of violent vengeance upon would-be enslavers, and the permanent acquisition of a replacement home and father.

The second biblical paraphrase elaborates upon Isaiah 63:1-8, a passage about God's prophesied arrival on earth.<sup>34</sup> The form of that arrival is a Christ-figure, fresh from defeating either the Edomites or Babylonians. In Wheatley's version, a figure approaches in "purple vesture" (33). Using the analogy of a winepress, the poem, like the Bible passage, explains that the figure has stained his clothing in a bloody trampling of God's enemies: "Compress'd in wrath the swelling wine-press groan'd, / It bled, and pour'd the gushing purple round" (33). The figure claims the victory as entirely his own -- "Mine was the act" -- and announces that his actions "[a]ton[e]" for others' "vices" (34). Next, Wheatley describes the scene of the battle from the perspective of the speaker instead of the Christ-figure. Adding details not present in her biblical source, she recounts how "[b]eneath his feet the prostrate troops were spread, / And round him lay the dying, and the dead" (34). She thereby invests Isaiah's prophecy with immediacy and her poetic

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<sup>34</sup> In his popular eighteenth-century commentary, Matthew Henry writes that the first section of Isaiah 63, the portion paraphrased by Wheatley, portrays "God coming towards his people in ways of mercy and deliverance, and this is to be joined to the close of the foregoing chapter, where it was said to Zion, 'Behold, thy salvation comes;' for here it is shown how it comes." See *An Exposition of the Old and New Testament* v. 4 (Philadelphia: Haswell, Barrington, and Haswell, 1838), 292.



voice with a measure of prophetic authority. When she turns to a question -- "What pow'r withstands if thou [Great God] indignant rise?" (34) -- she seems to be both speaking rhetorically and foretelling a future in which Christ shall reappear as a vengeful instrument of God's wrath. She concludes her dark poem by reassuring her spiritually-confident reader that God's people have nothing to fear:

Against thy [God's] *Zion* though her foes may rage,  
And all their cunning, all their strength engage,  
Yet she serenely on thy bosom lies,  
Smiles at their arts, and all their force defies. (34)

Like a child or a lover, the perhaps bloodthirsty *Zion* lies safely and peacefully in God's arms. She does not fear the antipathy and plots of her enemies, and seems to pleurably anticipate their brutal destruction.

The choice of this passage for a poem seems an odd selection.<sup>35</sup> The original passage is somewhat interpretively opaque with its jarring juxtaposition of carnage and "lovingkindnesses" (King James Bible 63:7). However, when one considers it in relation to "GOLIATH of GATH," a correlation emerges. Both poems imagine God's vengeance against those who would deny God. They fantasize about the arrival on earth of a divine order. When one further considers these biblical paraphrases in relation to the clear emancipatory message of Wheatley's elegies, they suggest frustration with the liminal

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<sup>35</sup> John and Charles Wesley also included a paraphrase of it in their *Hymns and Sacred Poems*, a text Wheatley was likely familiar with since the Wheatley family was connected to the Methodists. Their version, based upon John Norris's version, is more developed and structured, containing six stanzas of eight lines each. Wheatley's stanzas vary in length and follow the biblical passage more closely. The Wesleyan version reads as a conversation between the speaker and the Christ-figure in which the latter responds to the former's questions about the reddened clothing.

nature of slavery and the constant deferral of freedom. Despite the teachings she received about the nature of salvation, those teachings remained abstract in a society ideologically, socially, and economically dependent upon slavery. Therefore, when writing in the safe medium of biblical paraphrases, Wheatley is able to explore a fantasy of righteous and violent transformation in which God's egalitarian promise of love to the faithful becomes apparent on earth and those who have hypocritically closed the door upon that promise are punished.

That in both biblical paraphrases earth itself transforms suggests another component to Wheatley's anger. Though she aligns herself with the dead in her elegies, she cannot be entirely like them while her physical body remains on earth. She shares their knowledge, but not their heavenly bliss. In this way, she resembles the lingering dead of many African societies. As Thomas C. McCaskie describes it, the dead in these cultures had two burials, one primary and one secondary. In between the two rituals, the deceased were "detached from the social" but capable of intervening, often maliciously, in human affairs (McCaskie 427).<sup>36</sup> In order to share fully the dead's joyful afterlife, Wheatley could either die and go to God's kingdom *or* God's kingdom could come to her. Thus, the institutional continuation of slavery, because for her it so clearly indicates a pervasively sinful society, represents the indefinite extension of her identity as a lingering dead person whose only recourse is a second burial, this time within the grave. That such is the state of the social order augments her righteous anger with a sense of personal

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<sup>36</sup> The Yoruba, Asante, and Tio are some of the African cultures that held forms of this belief. See Jamieson 51. Both McCaskie and Jamieson point to Robert Hertz's *Death and the Right Hand*, trans. Rodney Needham and Claudia Needham (London: Cohen & West, 1960) as the anthropological source for studies into this form of mortuary practice.

outrage, yet another reminder that she does not yet share the bliss of a heavenly abode.

*"ON Death's domain I fix my eyes": Imagining Community in Wheatley's Elegies*

Because they deal with the death of the young and therefore parallel her own death-through-enslavement while a child, Wheatley's elegies about children are a particularly important source for revealing her alignment with the dead. Wheatley wrote six funeral elegies, or a third of the total, for individual children or, in one instance, a group that included a child.<sup>37</sup> An examination of these poems suggests that she views death as a journey through which one acquires exclusive knowledge and joins a divine community. Readings of her subtle imagery further indicate that she is akin to the dead children, not their mourning families.

Wheatley's "On the Death of a young Lady of Five Years of Age" perfectly demonstrates these points. In the poem, she opens by describing the journey of the dead girl, Nancy, to heaven: "FROM dark abodes to fair ethereal light / Th' enraptur'd innocent has wing'd her flight; / On the kind bosom of eternal love / She finds unknown beatitude above" (16). In heaven Nancy "feels the iron hand of pain no more" (16), and Wheatley even imagines the words by which she requests to learn a new "language" (17):

"Thou, Lord, whom I behold with glory crown'd,  
By what sweet name, and in what tuneful sound

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<sup>37</sup> See "On the Death of a young Lady of Five Years of Age," "A Funeral POEM on the Death of C.E. an Infant of Twelve Months," "To a LADY and her Children, on the Death of her Son and their Brother," "To a GENTLEMAN and LADY on the Death of the Lady's Brother and Sister, and a Child of the Name *Avis*, aged one Year," "On the Death of J. C. an Infant" (all found in *Poems on Various Subjects*), and "To Mr. and Mrs.--, on the Death of their Infant Son." She also wrote one of her two short epics, "NIOBE in Distress for her children slain by APOLLO," about a woman whose fourteen children are killed by the gods in response to what they see as her excessive pride.

Wilt thou be prais'd? Seraphic pow'rs are faint  
Infinite love and majesty to paint.  
To thee let all their grateful voices raise,  
And saints and angels join their songs of praise." (17)

Nancy's arrival in heaven inspires her to sing hymns to God. She speaks with humility and gratitude. Unlike their daughter, Nancy's parents engage in "fruitless groans," "tears," and "plaintive moans," and feel a "rising tumult of the soul" (17). Characterizing their reaction as somewhat selfish, Wheatley advises them to think upon Nancy's "bliss" and to "[r]estrain [their] tears" (17). She closes by reminding them that God "gives and takes away" (17), and that they can join their daughter in heaven through a Christian life:

Eye him in all, his holy name revere,  
Upright your actions, and your hearts sincere,  
Till having sail'd through life's tempestuous sea,  
And from its rocks, and boist'rous billows free,  
Yourselves, safe landed on the blissful shore,  
Shall join your happy babe to part no more. (17)

In this elegy, death is an event through which Nancy understands God and joins a heavenly community that shares her new knowledge. She "behold[s]" God's "glory"; death gives her a divine view and, by extension, divine understanding. She learns God's "sweet name" and the "tuneful sound" with which one should praise God. She joins with others' "grateful voices" in singing to God's glory. Understanding God through death

permits Nancy to enter a community that similarly shares her newfound visual and aural knowledge of God.

Wheatley calls upon the parents "to imitate [Nancy's] language" and thereby transform their loss into an acquisition of spiritual knowledge and community before their own deaths. Yet in choosing the word "imitate," she suggests the fruitlessness of such a call; their utterances will be mere imitations of Nancy's truer strains. Thus their sounds of lamentation continue, and Wheatley adds the alternative consolation that at least they can live a Christian life and join their daughter in heaven, thereby not only reuniting with her but also learning in truth, not by imitation, what Nancy already knows as they travel towards and arrive in heaven.

In stressing the distance and height of heaven, Wheatley may have been influenced by a combination of Mather Byles, the minor colonial Boston poet and minister, and John Milton, a poet she greatly admired. In "To a Friend, on the Death of a Relative," Byles similarly depicts death as a flight, writing:

See the fair Soul on Wings of Angels rise,  
Above the starry Concave of the Skies:  
Now here, now there she rolls her dazz'led Sight;  
Struck at the Prospect with immense Delight. (47)

His lines, like Wheatley's, indicate the new view that death brings. However, unlike Wheatley, the new view he imagines includes only the view of heaven and does not suggest the widening perspective the dead have upon the earth itself as they rise in flight. The sense of heaven as having an expansive view of the earth perhaps derives from

Milton's *Paradise Lost*.<sup>38</sup> In Book II, Milton memorably describes the earth as "hanging by a golden Chain" from Heaven (257). The physical distance between heaven and earth allows heaven an encompassing view and, by extension, a broader perspective.

Reversing the journey of Milton's Satan, who travels from the Gate of Heaven towards earth, Wheatley's dead children, like Nancy, ascend to heaven from earth and gradually achieve a divine view and knowledge.

In this poem, Wheatley subtly creates a parallel between her enslavement and physical death.<sup>39</sup> Like Nancy, Wheatley has felt "the iron hand of pain"; she arrived at a new home and asked "[b]y what [. . .] name" she should call her master; and she has learned a new "language." She has "sail'd through [a] life's tempestuous sea," the Atlantic; escaped "rocks" and winds; and arrived safely on a new "shore," America. In short, many of the images that she uses to describe Nancy's experience seem to emerge from her own experience of the Middle Passage. Moreover, like Nancy, she is mourned by her parents who, in her imagination at least, have groaned, cried, and moaned.<sup>40</sup> Thus, the poem suggests that she can write this elegy and attempt to console the parents because she is like Nancy. Her ability to explain Nancy's experiences and to ventriloquize her words aligns her with the heavenly community of divine understanding instead of the mortal one of grief and confusion.

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<sup>38</sup> Thank you to Greg Foran of the University of Texas at Austin for suggesting this comparison.

<sup>39</sup> Antonio T. Bly has also observed the parallels between Nancy and Wheatley; he asserts that Wheatley herself "is the subject of the poem's subtext." See his essay "Wheatley's 'On the Death of a Young Lady of Five Years of Age'" in *Explicator* 58.1 (1999), 11.

<sup>40</sup> The evidence that she has imagined her parents' bereavement is famously found in her poem to the Earl of Dartmouth. See my discussion of that poem below.

Wheatley's "A Funeral POEM on the Death of C. E. an Infant of Twelve Months" follows a similar structure of describing first the joy of death experienced by the infant, Charles Eliot, then the selfish grief of the parents, and a closing consolatory exhortation.<sup>41</sup> Like Nancy, Charles acquires new knowledge when he dies:

THROUGH airy roads he wings his instant flight  
To purer regions of celestial light;  
Enlarg'd he sees unnumber'd systems roll,  
Beneath him sees the universal whole,  
Planets on planets run their destin'd round,  
And circling wonders fill the vast profound.  
Th' ethereal now, and now th' empyreal skies  
With growing splendors strike his wond'ring eyes[.] (37-8)

His new knowledge is expansive and grows as he gets ever more distant from earth and gains ever more perspective. As a result of his journey and new knowledge, he receives an angelic welcome.

Like Nancy's parents, Charles's parents engage in "unavailing moan[s]" and their "pensive bosoms" "heave" with "groan[s]" (38). Wheatley chastises them for wanting to "tear him from the realms above" and dashes such "thoughtless" hopes by indicating that, even if he could return, he would not (38). His death has endowed him with a "superior air" and immunity to the temptation of earthly glories, including "[t]hrones and

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<sup>41</sup> For a more precise breakdown of Wheatley's elegiac structure, see Rigsby.

dominions" (38).<sup>42</sup> In depicting a previously wordless and helpless infant as becoming self-assured through the transformative process of death and the journey to heaven, Wheatley suggests that the knowledge one acquires through death is more valuable than anything on earth as well as unavailable to those who have not yet died.

That Wheatley shares with Charles in the acquisition of knowledge through death appears in the subtle parallels she again draws between herself and the dead child. First, she describes his ever expanding view while flying up to heaven and proclaims that he now "sees the universal whole." Her image evokes the same comprehensive view one acquires aboard a ship as one departs from (and approaches) the shore. In addition, the words Wheatley has Charles speak indicate that they are alike. Upon his arrival to heaven, the "raptur'd" Charles declares:

"Thanks to my God, who snatch'd me to the skies,  
E'er vice triumphant had possess'd my heart,  
E'er yet the tempter had beguil'd my heart,  
E'er yet on sin's base actions I was bent,  
E'er yet I knew temptation's dire intent;  
E'er yet the lash for horrid crimes I felt,  
E'er vanity had led my way to guilt[.]" (38)

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<sup>42</sup> Wheatley also did not choose to return to Africa when she had the opportunity. In a letter responding to John Thornton's request that she act as a Christian missionary to Africa, she refuses and declares, "Upon my arrival, how like a Barbarian Should I look to the Natives" (159). She implies that, like Charles in the poem, her death has made her no longer fit to return to her ancestral home. In Wheatley's case, the transformation is more poignant because it suggests that the knowledge and new values one attains also make one an outsider within one's home.



As Bassard points out, the verb *snatch* appears three times in Wheatley's writings (Bassard 63). One of the other appearances, found in *Poems on Various Subjects* soon after the elegy to Charles, is her memorable reference to being "snatch'd" from Africa in her poem to the Earl of Dartmouth (40).<sup>43</sup> When she places the word *snatch* in Charles's mouth and uses it to describe his death, she subtly indicates that they are alike in their experience of being snatched from their parents' homes. Her use of anaphora in the next several lines -- "E'er vice," "E'er yet," "E'er vanity," etc. -- causes them to stand in relief from the remainder of the poem and suggests their prominence and importance as does their enclosure in quotation marks. The first four anaphoric lines reference a prelapsarian existence in childhood through their discussion of "vice triumphant," "the tempter," "beguil[ment]," "sin," and "temptation's dire intent." Thus, they imply that, previous to being snatched, a child lives in an Edenic paradise.<sup>44</sup> However, Charles and, by extension, Wheatley are unlike Adam and Eve. They do not willfully disobey God, and they do not fall, a difference that the verb *snatch* underscores by shifting agency away from Charles and Wheatley. They acquire knowledge, yet it is the knowledge of salvation instead of sin.<sup>45</sup> Wheatley marks the end of the fourth anaphoric line with a semicolon and then concludes the anaphora with two more lines. In the fifth line -- "E'er yet the lash for horrid crimes I felt" -- Wheatley both augments the sense of relief she

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<sup>43</sup> The third use is found in "To MAECENAS," her poem to an unidentified patron or literary foreparent: "I'll snatch a laurel from thine honour'd head, / While you indulgent smile upon the deed" (10)

<sup>44</sup> Wheatley more directly equates Africa with Eden later in her career in the poem "PHILIS's [sic] Reply to the Answer in our last by the Gentleman in the Navy." There, she praises a naval officer's poem because his words cause "[P]leasing Gambia [to] my soul return[,] / With native grace in spring's luxuriant reign, / Smiles the gay mead, and Eden blooms again" (Wheatley 87).

<sup>45</sup> *Snatch* may suggest that part of what makes death transformative and post-death knowledge unavailable to the living is that the process itself is traumatic. Wheatley's works would provide a rich archive for trauma studies.

believes Charles's parents should feel over their son's escape from a sinful life and ironically suggests her own difference. She has seen and perhaps felt the lash despite having committed no crime, an experience that the visual placement of commas and a semicolon at the ends of these lines visually conveys. Her parents do not have the partial solace of knowing that her abduction has resulted in spiritual salvation and are aware only of her absence and captivity.

Before continuing, I would like to acknowledge that some might read this moment as problematic because it could suggest that, in aligning herself with the dead, Wheatley undermines her emancipatory message. If death brings with it such divine knowledge and transcendence over earthly concerns and if Wheatley casts herself as superior and authoritative through her "dead" persona, then perhaps slavery should be celebrated. Yet additional considerations indicate that this conclusion is not where her elegies point. First, as I noted above, slavery is cruel to those it leaves behind. The family members of the enslaved do not have even the partial consolation that Wheatley offers to her readers. Second, Wheatley's emancipatory message in her other writings often rests upon a view that infringing on another's freedom, either for political or economic reasons, is an act of immoral tyranny.<sup>46</sup> Admittedly, Wheatley walks something of a thin line between arguing against slavery while praising the spiritual salvation and authority that it has brought her. Yet even here she has Christian doctrine on her side. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, biblical figures, including Jesus

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<sup>46</sup> For writings which explicitly or implicitly argue against chattel slavery, see the aforementioned biblical paraphrases (19-25, 33-4) and her February 1774 letter to Samson Occom (152-3). For examples of poems which argue against political tyranny, see "To the Right Honourable WILLIAM, Earl of DARTMOUTH" (39-40), "America" (75-6), "On the Death of Mr. Snider Murder'd by Richardson" (77-8), and "LIBERTY AND PEACE, A POEM" (101-2).

himself, find transcendence over the material and access the divine in moments of subjugation and punishment. That they do so does not provide forgiveness or grace to those who oppressed them.

In her poem on Charles's Death, though Wheatley ostensibly writes in order to console the parents, she portrays her efforts as futile when she turns from ventriloquizing Charles and imagines the parents crying out for a return of their child in a nightly ritual:

["]Delightful infant, nightly visions give  
Thee to our arms, and we with joy receive,  
We fain would clasp the *Phantom* to our breast,  
The *Phantom* flies, and leaves the soul unblest." (38-9)

Through the transformative process of dying, Charles has become a phantom. The parents cannot grasp him though they try again and again. Their continued attempts, despite their repeated failure, show that they also cannot learn their lesson. Not having experienced death themselves, they are prisoners to their bereavement, a moment that they ritually repeat night after night. In describing their state as "unblest," Wheatley marks their grief as an impediment to their relationship with God. To these parents who lack knowledge and the ability to gain it, the only alternative consolation Wheatley can provide is the expectation that someday their cycle of daily bereavement will end. Only then will they be blessed. In another moment, she even criticizes Charles's parents who, through "thoughtless wishes, and prepost'rous love," seek to "tear him from the realms above" (38). The parents are simultaneously unthinking in their desires and ridiculous in their emotions. Recall that Wheatley characterizes Nancy's parents similarly. Caught up

by their bereavement, they express "fruitless groans," "tears," and "plaintive moans," and feel a "rising tumult of the soul" (17). Thus, in both instances, grief is debilitating, a sort of affective prison that blocks access to the divine.<sup>47</sup> In contrast to both sets of parents, Wheatley's ability to authoritatively question parental woe and to explain the wishes and experiences of dead child separate her from these living, white mourners in terms of knowledge *and* emotion.

In "To a GENTLEMAN and LADY on the Death of the Lady's Brother and Sister, and a Child of the Name *Avis*, aged one Year," Wheatley structures her poem somewhat differently. She opens with a meditation upon the cruelty and selfishness of death, which has greedily claimed generations of people:

ON *Death's* domain I fix my eyes,  
Where human nature in vast ruin lies:  
With pensive mind I search the drear abode,  
Where the great conqu'ror has his spoils bestow'd;  
[W]here there the offspring of six thousand years  
In endless numbers to my view appears:  
Whole kingdoms in his gloomy den are thrust,  
And nations mix with their primeval dust:  
Insatiate still he gluts the ample tomb;  
His is the present, his the age to come. (45)

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<sup>47</sup> Excessive grief was constantly monitored against in eighteenth-century America. Men were most likely to advise against mourning too much or too long, especially when addressing female readers. See Eustace 293-310.

Unlike the other poems discussed above, this elegy opens with a personification of death, described by an observer speaking in the first person. It seems to argue that the afterlife is unpleasant and sorrowful, and death is ravenous and inevitable. After this gloomy opening stanza, Wheatley transitions to a harshly consoling message in the second: "But, *Madam*, let your grief be laid aside" (45). She should do so because her grief is "in vain": death, uninfluenced by "sighs" and "tears," is a "tyrant" who "reigns" "o'er this mortal shore" (45).

The third and final stanza offers a more gentle consolation than the previous two. The first four lines abandon the personification of death and instead allude to death as an inevitable outcome of God's will:

The glowing stars and silver queen of light  
At last must perish in the gloom of night:  
Resign thy friends to that Almighty hand,  
Which gave them life, and bow to his command[.] (45)

Here, Wheatley reveals that the initial despondent meditation upon death's "endless" victims is, in actuality, a fanciful image inspired by the nighttime sky in which the countless stars appeared to be the numberless dead (45). In calling her audience to "[r]esign thy friends," she stages this final stanza as moment in which she will resign fancy for spiritual truth.<sup>48</sup> The truth that she provides is that death brings knowledge, salvation, and a release from grief, and she expresses this truth by speculating upon Avis's experience and message to those who remain behind:

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<sup>48</sup> For a more involved meditation upon the purposes of fancy, see Wheatley's "Thoughts on the WORKS of PROVIDENCE" (26-29).

Her soul enlarg'd to heav'nly pleasure springs,

She feeds on truth and uncreated things.

Methinks I hear her in the realms above,

And leaning forward with a filial love,

Invite you there to share immortal bliss

Unknown, untasted in a state like this. (45-46)

For Avis, death is not a "drear abode" where "human nature in vast ruin lies," as it seems to be from earth, but is in fact a "pleasur[able]" and "bliss[ful]" place to which she "[i]nvite[s]" others.

The ability to relinquish fancy in favor of spiritual truth appears to connect to sensory ability. Whereas the beginning explains what one sees when one "search[es]" with the "eyes" and "pensive mind" of a mourner, the final stanza's narration of Avis's post-death discoveries relate to taste -- Avis "feeds on truth" -- and sound -- "Methinks I hear her" -- as well as sight. This expansion of the senses seems to be part of death's transformativity since it occurs alongside a description of Avis's "soul" as "enlarg'd to heav'nly pleasure." The poem deepens the suggestion that divine knowledge is unavailable to the living when Wheatley describes "immortal bliss" as "[u]nknown, untasted" to Avis's mourners, thus further marking them as simultaneously epistemically and sensorially deprived.<sup>49</sup> Since Wheatley uses senses other than sight when she "hear[s]" Avis and communicates her message (thus moving beyond inarticulate "sighs"),

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<sup>49</sup> My reading aligns with Bassard's. In her survey of Wheatley's 1773 elegies, she determines that "Wheatley's anatomy of grief is physical -- the physical senses fail, which provokes bodily responses (sighs, moans, tears abound in the elegies)" (69).

she suggests that her elegies are acts of translation and that her consolatory message is exceptional. Unlike her free audience, she has the ability to transcend the limiting perspective of the living and to offer truth and solace. Her use of phrases such as "mortal shore" and "seas of the air" (45) heighten the impression that it is her experience of enslavement and transatlantic journey that enables her to take on this role.

Though the poem exposes the despairing image of death as false, some aspects of the opening stanza's description remain suggestive. The constant between the opening image and the final, more hopeful stanza is the presence of Avis and the other family members. The falsity of the despairing image is in its despair, not in its vision of an immortal population that includes all those who have gone before. Therefore, what remains from that opening image is a suggestion of a vast community of the dead. Within that image, Wheatley includes not only Avis and the other newly dead relatives that the elegy specifically mourns, but "the offspring of six thousand years."<sup>50</sup> When she adds, "Whole kingdoms in his gloomy den are thrust, / And nations mix with their primeval dust," she recalls the thrusting of whole "kingdoms" of Africans into the "gloomy den[s]" of slave ships and the "mix[ture]" of "nations" that their bowels contain. The community of the dead includes the white free persons that Wheatley eulogizes on the behalf of others *and* her own ancestors and family and fellow enslaved Africans who commingle together through their shared experience of death.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Wheatley's words resonate with Toni Morrison's dedication in *Beloved*: "Sixty Million and more." See *Beloved* (New York: Plume, 1987), n. pag. Thank you to Lisa Moore of the University of Texas at Austin for this observation.

<sup>51</sup> In this moment, Wheatley's writing performs what Karla F. C. Holloway calls (re)membrance. Describing (re)membrance as a shared characteristic of black women authors, Holloway contends that it connects to myth and allows black women to "align[] real and imaginative events [. . . Myth] is a

Though Wheatley's funeral elegies for children most clearly demonstrate her alignment with a community of the dead that shares exclusive knowledge, her elegies to adults manifest some of the same elements. For example, in "To a Lady on the Death of her Husband," Wheatley follows a structure similar to that of the poem about Avis and her family. The opening lines address the "GRIM monarch" death directly (18). However, here Wheatley focuses upon death's indifference to the pleas and sorrows of the bereaved instead of creating an image of a dreary afterlife: "Dost thou go on incessant to destroy, / Our griefs to double, and lay waste our joy?" (18). Her words evoke the inexorable and insatiable progress of death that places "heavy fetters" on the body and "spreads" over it "the deep impervious shade," images that suggest an affinity between the lady's dead husband, the white physician Thomas Leonard, and herself, who has been fettered by enslavement due to the "deep . . . shade" of her skin (18). Yet Wheatley insists that this bleak characterization of death is the perception of the living and, in fact, the dead continue to have "active soul[s]" and "joyful spirit[s]" once they have "mount[ed]" to heaven and left the "earth behind" (19). She continues to indicate the acquisition of new perceptions, unavailable to the living, when she declares that the pleasures of the afterlife are "better suited to th' immortal mind" (19). Since Wheatley is able to transcend and poetically identify the problems in her audience's understanding of death, she aligns herself with the dead and their acquisition of new knowledge.

Three other elegies for adults of varying ages suggest Wheatley's alignment with

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dynamic entity that (re)members community, connects it to the voices from which it has been severed." See *Moorings and Metaphors: Figures of Culture and Gender in Black Women's Literature* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 25.



the dead through their portrayal of the dead as musicians. In "On the Death of a Young Gentleman," she praises the young gentleman for his "sweet [. . .] anthems" and the "divine [. . .] joys" of his heavenly harp (18). In "To a Clergyman on the Death of his Lady," she imagines Reverend Pitkin's dead wife "warbl[ing]" "praise eternal" among "choirs angelic" (31). Finally, in "To His Honour the Lieutenant-Governor, on the Death of his Lady, *March 24, 1773*," she envisions the recently deceased Mary Sanford Oliver sitting in heaven:

Hail'd with acclaim among the heav'nly choirs,  
Her soul new-kindling with seraphic fires,  
To notes divine she tunes the vocal strings,  
While heav'n's high concave with the music rings.  
*Virtue's* rewards can mortal pencil paint?  
No -- all descriptive arts, and eloquence are faint;  
Nor canst thou, *Oliver*, assent refuse  
To heav'nly tidings from the *Afric* muse. (61)

These depictions of the dead as engaging in song suggest a similarity between their divine activities and Wheatley's poetic authorship. Moreover, music in heaven defies "mortal" description and is a communal endeavor that includes both the dead and the angels. Because she repeatedly accesses and communicates these moments of communal song in heaven while denying that her audience will be able to fully understand her words, she suggests that her works are a product of her membership in an exclusive divine community. When she warns Andrew Oliver that he cannot "refuse" the "heav'nly

tidings from the *Afric* muse," she locates her affiliation with the divine musical community in her identity as an African and, by extension, a slave.

In this examination of Wheatley's elegies, we see how Wheatley aligns herself with a community of the dead through repeatedly indicating her epistemic similarity to the deceased subjects of her elegies and her affective dissimilarity to her living audience. Like her, the dead have undergone a transformative process that has provided them with an enlarged perspective and new knowledge as well as released them from mundane emotions. The new knowledge relates to the acquisition of language, an expansion of the senses, and an enhanced relationship with the divine. In short, this process results in the realization of a body of knowledge, only accessible to the dead, an epistemology of death. Capitalizing upon her similarity to the dead, Wheatley casts herself as a member of this epistemic community. She denies membership to her white audience of mourners since they grieve excessively and are incapable of controlling affect.

In asserting her allegiance with the dead, Wheatley suggests that her audience should heed her writings' emancipatory message, including its abolitionist implications, not out of pity but out of deference. Nicole Eustace points to the limited empowerment available to black women who identified as mourners. She reasons, "In a world where dispiritedness was taken to be the usual condition of the 'natural' slave, the leverage to be gained by displays of grief was inherently limited" (300). Wheatley resists classification as a sorrowing slave and instead links herself to a more authoritative community, the dead. Her antislavery message, then, emanates from a position of power, not subservience. If she is like the dead and therefore superior in terms of divine knowledge,

her equation of freedom -- spiritual, political, corporal -- with God's righteous vision for the earth is invested with divine epistemic authority.

*Forgetting to Mourn: Wheatley's Consolatory Message to her Black Audience*

In textually establishing these two communities through her elegies, Wheatley extends the temporal relationship between the living and the dead. In doing so, she offers a consolatory message to her black audience, one that parallels but remains inaccessible (and most likely unapparent) to her white audience. As death follows life, Wheatley's elegies similarly argue that knowledge follows emotion, salvation follows captivity, and authority follows helplessness. In order to move from one set to the other, one must experience the transformative process of dying. Thus, knowledge, salvation, and authority are matters of experience. Because they, like Wheatley, have undergone death-through-enslavement, her black audience can access the consolation of viewing themselves as similarly released from emotion, captivity, and helplessness and uniquely knowledgeable, spiritually saved, and authoritative. While admittedly this self-identification with a community of the dead does not translate into physical freedom, Wheatley suggests that it does extricate her fellow enslaved Africans from a debilitating self-identification as powerless, isolated grievers.

This consolatory message is in many ways dependent upon a rejection of sorrow. Wheatley models this rejection for her audience through her one poetic reference to her own experience of grief and through her modeling of another's. In one of her most outspoken political poems, "To the Right Honourable WILLIAM, Earl of

DARTMOUTH," she famously refers to her father. Despite the fact that this moment is a rare, open allusion to the moment of her enslavement, she maintains a reasonable persona:

Should you, my lord, while you peruse my song,  
Wonder from whence my love of *Freedom* sprung,  
Whence flow these wishes for the common good,  
By feeling hearts alone best understood,  
I, young in life, by seeming cruel fate  
Was snatch'd from *Afric's* fancy'd happy seat:  
What pangs excruciating must molest,  
What sorrows labour in my parent's breast?  
Steel'd was that soul and by no mastery mov'd  
That from a father seiz'd his babe below'd[.] (40)

Though Wheatley alludes to her father in order to explain her own "love of *Freedom*," it is actually her father's emotions that she imagines. According to these lines, her enslavement produces grief in her father and it is the knowledge of his "sorrows," not her own loss, that results in her love of freedom. Therefore, her "love of *Freedom*" seems less a sentimental emotion and more a reasoned feeling arising out of her personal experience, just as the bliss of heaven reasonably arises from proximity to the divine. While her father remains persecuted by grief -- "pangs excruciating must molest" him -- she is the master of affective and epistemic self, so much so that she can lecture a lord and politician about his new government position. Crucially, she does not characterize

herself as unaware of emotion. Only the "[s]teel'd [. . .] soul" of the slaver is insensitive to a parent's grief. In this poem, Wheatley characterizes herself as purposefully dispassionate and superiorly knowledgeable.

Together, the above poem and the elegies already discussed suggest that the only end to the excessive grief of bereavement is death, the moment when those left behind join their lost family members and finally acquire the knowledge of heaven that they could, at best, only imitate in life. This suggestion is most clearly borne out in "To the Honourable T. H. Esq; on the Death of his Daughter." It does so because it was written upon the death of Thankfull Leonard, the same woman that Wheatley consoled with the poem "To a Lady on the Death of Her Husband." It provides a portrait of Thankfull Leonard after death that can be compared to the portrait of her as a mourner.

In the poem, death finally brings an end to Leonard's persistent grief. Wheatley asserts that, unlike Leonard's father whose "bosom" is "rack[ed]" with "incessant woe," Leonard's woe over the death of her husband has finally ended:

She unreluctant flies to see no more  
Her dear-lov'd parents on earth's dusky shore:  
Impatient heav'n's resplendent goal to gain,  
She with swift progress cuts the azure plain,  
Where grief subsides, where changes are no more,  
And life's tumultuous billows cease to roar;  
She leaves her earthly mansion for the skies,  
Where new creations feast her wond'ring eyes. (52)

As if these lines were not enough to showcase the emotional change that death brings, Wheatley, even more directly, alludes to Leonard's pre- and post-death affective state: "She, who late wish'd that *Leonard* might return, / Has ceas'd to languish, and forgot to mourn" (52). Leonard's emotional transition is so total that she has "forgot[ten] to mourn." It appears that the salvational knowledge that comes with death is so massive and powerful that one no longer remembers to grieve. Yet, like Wheatley in the poem to Dartmouth, Leonard retains her ability to see unhappiness in others. Ventriloquizing her subject, Wheatley writes, "As far as grief affects an happy soul / So far doth grief my better mind controul, / To see on earth my aged parents mourn" (53). Leonard sees her parents mourn, and the sight touches her. However, with death she has acquired a "better mind" that enables her to "controul" the sadness she feels over her parents' grief and to offer them the comfort of a shared afterlife, just as Wheatley did in her elegy upon the death of Leonard's husband. In dying, Leonard has become like Wheatley and joined Wheatley's community.

"NIOBE in Distress," the poem following the elegy upon the death of Thankfull Leonard and the longest in the collection, offers a counterpoint to the preceding poem by portraying the dangers of excessive affect and love. Though not a funeral elegy, the poem addresses themes of death, grief, and powerlessness as it retells the story of a classical figure, Niobe. A semi-divine queen and mother, Niobe feels "love too vehement" for her "[s]even sprightly sons" and "[s]even daughters beauteous" (54). When her female subjects begin to worship the goddess Latona, Niobe berates them for offering "tribute" and "petitions" to Latona instead of herself, and orders them to "take the leaves

of laurel from [their] brows" (55). She believes she can risk angering the goddess because she has "a large progeny" and the loss of one child would still leave her with many (55). Furious, Latona sends her children Phoebus (Apollo) and Phoebe (Artemis) to exact revenge. One by one, Phoebus kills all seven of Niobe's sons as she watches. When, in the midst of her "unhappy mourn[ing]," a repentant but still proud Niobe taunts the goddess by reminding her that her other children yet "remain" (55), Phoebus kills her seven daughters and leaves Niobe childless. Wheatley's composition ends with the last daughter's death and an image of a begging Niobe "embrac[ing]" her dying body (59). A final stanza, written by another hand according to the published version, recounts how Niobe became a "marble statue" in response to the "shock" of these losses (59).

As a poem immediately following an elegy to a woman who, upon the death of her husband, cries and sighs and takes on the burden of a "load of anguish" in her "heart" (19), and who only learns to "controul" her grief when death allows her a "better mind" (53), the epyllion on Niobe suggests that earthly emotions -- pride, despair -- are a burden and a flaw, especially when they are felt disproportionately.<sup>52</sup> As Niobe experiences loss upon loss, the impression of mourning as an affective prison deepens. Perhaps Wheatley chose to include the final stanza, despite not having written it herself, precisely because it conveys this impression even more forcefully by recounting Niobe's transformation into a statue.

Understanding Wheatley's claim to a dead and dispassionate persona does not

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<sup>52</sup> Early in the poem, Wheatley foreshadows the ending and identifies excess of maternal love, not pride or audacity, as the cause of Niobe's downfall: "But thou had'st far the happier mother prov'd, / If this fair offspring had been less below'd" (54).

negate her simultaneous and omnipresent claim to humanity. Instead, it places her work within a black Atlantic tradition that utilizes death to envision a vibrant post-enslavement, post-transportation community. Enslaved communities, especially in the south, decorated burial sites with objects that often symbolized water, such as shells and jugs, thereby interpreting the Middle Passage's watery graves not as individual and racial inconsequentiality but as the first instances of a collective practice that honors the beginnings available in endings.<sup>53</sup> In colonial New York City, black persons built a cemetery on the outskirts of town that commemorated their dead for centuries and that, since its rediscovery almost two decades ago, generated a new community from the descendents of those interred.<sup>54</sup> In Newport, Philadelphia, and Boston, the desire to properly bury black bodies was "a motivating force behind the organization of [African American] mutual aid societies" (47). As in these instances and in many others, Wheatley's poems posit that certain forms of freedom are not continually deferred. They suggest to her black audience, perhaps reading her poems but more likely hearing them as their slave owners or others read them aloud, that they share in an epistemic community of the dead that has a circumscribed earthly presence and a vast heavenly one. Even without emancipation, an enslaved person can claim freedom from grief. To her white audience, her poems intimate that she has an authority that they cannot access, no matter how learned they are.

To speak of Wheatley's contemporaneous black audience is to speak of something

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<sup>53</sup> See Angelika Kruger-Kahloula's "Homage and Hegemony: African American Grave Inscription and Decoration" in *Slavery in the Americas*, edited by Genevieve Fabre and Robert O'Malley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 317-35.

<sup>54</sup> See Joyce Hansen's and Gary McGowan's *Breaking Ground, Breaking Silence: The Story of New York's African Burial Ground* (New York: Henry Holt, 1998).



verifiable and substantial. In the first place, we know of several black persons who read her works. She shared a correspondence with and sent book copies to Obour Tanner, a black Christian woman in Newport, Rhode Island.<sup>55</sup> Jupiter Hammon read her writings and published poems in response while living with his master in Hartford, Connecticut.<sup>56</sup> She wrote a poem to Scipio Moorhead, a black artist living in Boston who likely painted the portrait of her that continues to be circulated.<sup>57</sup> Beyond individuals, black people lived in the homes of her elegiac subjects' families and friends. They would likely have heard Wheatley's poems read aloud as part of the informal mourning rituals. Their masters may have hung copies of her elegies on their walls in remembrance of those they had lost. A number of her elegies, such as her poems to and about Thankfull Leonard, appeared as broadsides and in newspapers in Boston, Newport, Philadelphia, and London. Therefore, even black persons living in households less directly interested in Wheatley's elegies would have had the opportunity to hear her poems read aloud in the evenings as the household drew together. Moreover, New England had a tightly clustered black population, with at least 900 black persons living in Boston, at least 1000 in Hartford County, Connecticut, and at least 1200 living in Newport during the latter half of the eighteenth century (Piersen 15-18, 163). Based upon this clustering, it seems possible, if not probable, that her poems were shared during black gatherings. It seems especially likely that Tanner shared Wheatley's poems at the evangelical prayer meetings

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<sup>55</sup> She confirms sending five books in a May 6, 1774 letter to Tanner (Wheatley 156-57).

<sup>56</sup> See his poems "AN ADDRESS to Miss Phillis Wheatley" and "A Poem for Children with Thoughts on Death." Both are found in Appendix C of Wheatley's *Complete Writings* (204-11).

<sup>57</sup> See "To S.M. a young *African* Painter, on seeing his Works" (Wheatley 59-60).

that she and several hundred black Newport residents attended weekly.<sup>58</sup> Therefore, Wheatley had access to a significant black audience, capable of reading and hearing her poems and envisioning themselves as part of her poetic community.

### **"let us imagine": Wheatley in Mourning**

In a March 1774 letter, Phillis Wheatley wrote to her friend and reader Obour Tanner about the recent death of her former mistress, Susannah Wheatley. She writes:

I have lately met with a great trial in the death of my mistress; let us imagine the loss of a Parent, Sister or Brother the tenderness of all these were united in her.--I was a poor little outcast & a stranger when she took me in: not only into her house but I presently became a sharer in her most tender affections. I was treated by her more like her child than her servant; no opportunity was left unimprov'd, of giving me the best of advice, but in terms how tender! how engaging! This I hope ever to keep in remembrance. Her exemplary life was a greater monitor than all her precepts and Instruction, thus we may observe of how much greater force example is than instruction. To alleviate our sorrows we had the satisfaction to se[e] her depart for the *upper* Courts of the Lord. Do, my dear friend, remember me & this family in your Closet, that this afflicting dispensation may be sanctify'd unto us. (153-4)

In this letter, perhaps the moment Wheatley comes closest to writing an elegy about

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<sup>58</sup> For a discussion of this community and its leader, Sarah Osborn, see Chapter 2.

someone whom she herself deeply mourned, she abandons her elegiac style and expresses something of her own grief. In doing so, she demonstrates the limits of poetically claiming membership in a community of the dead. Wheatley is not dead and neither are her emotions. Thus her textual establishment of two separate communities and its invitation to her black audience are surrogates, to use Roach's term, instead of substitutes. Even as they occur in response to the traumatic events of enslavement, they are reminders of what has been irrevocably lost.

Wheatley's loss of her beloved former mistress in 1774 was only the first in a series of losses. John Wheatley, Susannah's husband, and Mary Wheatley Lathrop, their daughter, died in 1778. Though the Wheatley family had emancipated her in October 1773, they had continued to support her, and she lived with Lathrop in Providence after John Wheatley, a Loyalist, was forced to flee Boston. With their deaths, she lost her adoptive family and her literary patrons. Though she continued to write and to publish in newspapers and broadsides, she was unable to find a publisher for a subsequent volume. She married John Peters in 1778, and the young couple, like most free blacks, soon found themselves in financial difficulties. Their three children died very young, and Wheatley herself died in childbirth in 1784. In his introduction to her writings, Vincent Carretta conjectures on an alternate biography: "Had she remained in London in 1773, Wheatley very probably would have found a publisher for her second volume. Interest in her work and her status as a woman writer of color certainly continued after her departure" (xxxv). We can imagine the life she could have lead, the role she could have played in Britain's abolition movement, the financial security and artistic confidence she could have gained,

and the even richer archive she could have left. Thus, there is much to mourn.

Yet, as the above letter intimates, imagining loss can be a generative act. Tanner was, like Wheatley, an enslaved African. When Wheatley writes the words "let us imagine the loss of a Parent, Sister or Brother" to Tanner, she refers to their shared experience of bereavement and enslavement. Both she and Tanner can imagine such a loss all too well because they have already experienced it. In inviting Tanner to imagine her newest loss, she enfolds Susannah Wheatley into their history of loss and the community of the dead. Similarly, as her black audience reads or hears her elegies, they receive the same invitation: "let us imagine the loss." They enfold the newly dead into their community and perhaps, for a moment, forget to mourn.

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In Phillis Wheatley's elegies contain two competing intimacies. On the one hand, there is the affective attachment that can bind family members. On the other hand, there is the intimacy of shared knowledge and experience. Though her elegies center upon the grief that occurs when there is a rupture among the first category of intimates, the poems actually privilege the intimacy of the second. The semi-public community of the dead that her elegies produce, though fictive, offers a kind of consolation to her fellow enslaved Africans. This audience, like her, may have been completely severed from their own family members and homeland. If they do have familial connections to others in America, those connections are tenuous, a fact which Phillis's and Bobey's story from the preceding chapter underscores.

In the next chapter, I examine friendship in a Revolutionary Era commonplace book, published for the first time in 1997 as *Milcah Martha Moore's Book*. The book will also present a fictive semi-public community, though it will be proposing that community as a real alternative to the period's political fragmentation. As in the case of Coosaponakeesa and Eliza Lucas Pinckney, intimacy will set the terms for communal inclusion and exclusion.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### A "Union of the Soul":

#### Friendship, Piety, and Politics in Milcah Martha Moore's Book

In 1778, Pennsylvanian Milcah Martha Moore wrote an intimate letter to Hannah Moore, the older sister who had raised her from the age of twelve. In the letter, she discusses her fears about a "mispent Life" and imagines the consequences:

I once heard d.<sup>r</sup> Sis.<sup>r</sup> Morris tell thee in a Fit of Sickness that "if she was to live her Life over again she did not know any one action of it that she c.<sup>d</sup> mend." How widely different in my Situation, a Sight of my past mispent Life has been almost too much for me to bear. -- Does thee remember when I was last in Town I told thee how I had been terrified one Night in my Sleep, at find.<sup>g</sup> I was left all alone, & being told that I was forsaken of my God as well as Man? I wak'd myself screaming.<sup>1</sup>

In these lines, Moore aligns divine and human companionship, but prioritizes divine over human. These lines also express her anxiety over the possible loss of either. For her, these fears were not abstract. Moore had been disowned by the Society of Friends due to

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<sup>1</sup> See Milcah Martha Moore, letter to Hannah Moore, [ca. 9 mo. 1778?], Edward Wanton Smith box 955, Haverford College Quaker Collection, Haverford.

her consanguineous 1767 marriage to Charles Moore, her cousin. She had also removed from Philadelphia to rural Montgomery County when British troops encroached upon the city during the American Revolution.<sup>2</sup> The Revolution had caused disruptions within her religious community due to disagreements over politics, and many non-Friends in the region berated and even imprisoned Friends because of the Society's official stance of neutrality and pacifism. In light of these events, this letter's suggestion that Moore felt a sense of isolation from her God and the religious community to which she had remained affiliated is unsurprising. Perhaps, she had previously managed her isolation through daily urban proximity to her many non-disowned friends. Perhaps, this isolation was compounded by her own unspecified sense of sinfulness and by the violent schisms erupting throughout the region and the colonies. The idea of being "forsaken of my God as well as Man" causes her to awaken screaming, a vivid response which highlights how viscerally painful she believes such a simultaneous loss would be.

I begin with this epistolary expression of anxiety because it suggests that, for Moore, spirituality, community, and politics are intimately connected. The remainder of this chapter explores Moore's definition of one specific form of human companionship, friendship, and how it aligns with spirituality. Focusing primarily upon one of her revolutionary era commonplace books, recently published as *Milcah Martha Moore's Book*, I argue that Moore characterizes true friendship as principally pious. The pious nature of true friendship determines friendship's other aspects: reciprocity, temporality, and exclusivity. As I will show, the entries in *Moore's Book* first define true friendship,

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<sup>2</sup> General Howe led British troops to Philadelphia in September 1777 and occupied that city until June 1778.

then apply its tenets to politics, thereby using friendship to guide a critique of the Revolution. By analyzing how *Moore's Book* constitutes and applies friendship, this chapter seeks to illuminate the possible roles of religion, affection, and elite women in commenting upon and offsetting the political turmoil of the American Revolutionary period, a time when the community-engendering potential of texts was particularly potent.<sup>3</sup>

*Milcah Martha Moore: Biography and Writings*

Milcah Martha Moore was born Milcah Martha Hill in Madeira in 1740 to the Friends Richard Hill and Deborah Moore Hill.<sup>4</sup> She was the youngest survivor of that couple's twelve children. At the time, four of her siblings resided in Philadelphia under the care of her eldest sister, Hannah, who was married to the prominent Friend Samuel Preston Moore. At the age of eleven, Milcah Martha Hill left behind her parents and three sisters, and traveled to Philadelphia to join Hannah and her other siblings. Called Patty or Patsy by her family and friends, she lived the rest of her life in the Delaware Valley amongst its influential and thriving community of Friends. In 1767, she married her cousin-twice-over Dr. Charles Moore (their parents and their maternal grandparents were siblings).

Due to their consanguinity, the Society of Friends advised against the marriage, and the newly married couple was disowned by their religious community when they

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<sup>3</sup> Here, I am clearly indebted to the work of Benedict Anderson as well as his successors. See Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 1991).

<sup>4</sup> Madeira is a Portuguese island off the western coast of North Africa.



ignored the warning. The Moores maintained close ties with this community through family members and friends as well as Charles's standing as a doctor. In a 1780 letter, Moore even refers to their continuing presence at Meetings, despite the official prohibition against doing so; she remarks, "[W]e had been frequently assured by many of our friends, that our attending their meetings of business, gave offence to none of them" (Smith 243). Moore was not able to rejoin the Society until after her husband's death in 1801. Despite the repercussions of their marriage, the couple was apparently affectionate and deeply committed. They had no children.

In 1776, when British troops appeared liable to march on Philadelphia, Moore and her husband fled the city for rural Montgomery County, just north of Philadelphia. They remained at their rural home through the Revolution and beyond. While there, Moore compiled her three extant manuscript books. The one now published as *Moore's Book* includes 126 selections written by a combination of female and male authors. Most of the entries are poetry, including contemplations of politics, community, religion, and friendship. At least ninety selections were written by four women in Moore's Philadelphia community: Susanna Wright, Hannah Griffitts, Hester (Hetty) Griffitts, and Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson. Other texts include ones written by her acquaintance Benjamin Franklin; Patrick Henry, the rhetorically savvy revolutionary; and Jonathan Odell, a New Jersey Loyalist.

Many of the prose entries are letters, some of which had been printed in periodicals and/or copied into others' commonplace books. Significantly, one of the prose entries is a series of excerpts from Fergusson's travel diary, kept during a visit to

Europe. This travel diary, circulated throughout the literary Philadelphia community, was "the stuff of oral legend" and praised in a publication by Benjamin Rush (Ousterhout 1, 81-2). However, Moore's transcriptions of the diary, as in the case of many of the poems, are the only remnants extant today. Because of its wealth of prose and poetry written by well-known but mostly unpublished women authors in the period, this commonplace book was edited and published by Karin A. Wulf and Catherine La Courreye Blecki. The other two extant Moore manuscript books are a smaller devotional which she began in 1776 and which contains what appear to be fourteen or fifteen transcriptions of personal religious meditations,<sup>5</sup> and a large commonplace book containing transcriptions of texts written by or about prominent or local Friends,<sup>6</sup> many of which were published and at least some of which are found in other contemporaneous commonplace books (I will refer to this as her Testimony Book).<sup>7</sup>

In addition to these three manuscript books, the archive of Moore writings includes letters to friends and family, most of which are housed at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and Haverford College. She also apparently kept another commonplace book which she shared amongst her friends and family who in turn shared it with others.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> "Personal" because she does not mention other authorship and seems to refer to her and Charles's separation from other Friends, possibly due to the war though more likely due to their banishment from the Quaker meeting. "Transcriptions" because the texts are clean with few corrections or insertions.

<sup>6</sup> While most contemporary studies of the Society of Friends, including those written by its members, use the term Quaker interchangeably with Friend, I have chosen to use Friend because Moore, Griffitts, and their contemporaries appear not to have used the term Quaker, which was still something of an epithet in the eighteenth century. However, occasionally I will refer to Quakerism when discussing the religion's theology generally.

<sup>7</sup> These other two manuscript books reside at the Haverford College Library (Quaker Collection MS 975A and MS 975B).

<sup>8</sup> Probably referring to the miscellany manuscript, but also potentially *Moore's Book* or her Testimony Book, a 1776 letter most likely from her sister Margaret Morris explains how the book was "unveil[ed]" to neighbors and urges Moore to "[b]e less covetous, my Patty, of the choice flowers thee has picked from

The document proved so suitable for schoolchildren that, "at the request of her friends," she published it as an educational miscellany in 1787 (Moore iii). Containing many excerpts by such authors as Alexander Pope, Joseph Addison, and Edward Young, the published *Miscellanies, Moral and Instructive* has markedly different content than *Moore's Book*, though the manuscript version circulating in years prior may have included additional or alternative entries. *Miscellanies* was reprinted at least eight times and was used in schools for the next several decades.

Despite its clear importance as a text created by and for an elite literary circle, and containing otherwise unavailable pieces, *Moore's Book* has been understudied. The most thorough treatment is found in the two introductions to *Moore's Book*. The first, "*Milcah Martha Moore's Book: Documenting Culture and Connection in the Revolutionary Era*" by Wulf, "looks at Milcah Martha Moore's world as revealed through her commonplace book: her family and friends; her Quaker background, childhood, and marriage; the significance of writing and reading, particularly in early America; and the dramatic events of the American Revolution" ("Documenting Culture" 4). This essay provides a thorough introduction to Moore's personal and historic background, and testifies to literacy's role in her production and circulation of opinions. The second introduction, "*Reading Moore's Book: Manuscripts vs. Print Culture and the Development of Early American Literature*" by Blecki, focuses more on the text's classification as a commonplace book. Blecki attends to the book's organization and proposes that its purpose is to preserve texts written by women in Moore's literary circle and to place them

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reading" (Letter to Milcah Martha Moore, "6th day afternoon," 1776, Thomas Stewardson Letters (Am. 1605), Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia).

in conversation with those of a larger community. While both these introductions are indispensable for understanding *Moore's Book*, their necessarily broad scope indicates that more focused analyses can and should be undertaken.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, in scrutinizing *Moore's Book* and exploring its construction and deployment of pious friendship, I intend to supplement the scholarship about it, its contents, and its authors.

In addition to supplementing scholarship specifically about Moore's commonplace book and literary circle, this essay also seeks to contribute more generally to scholarship about manuscript culture and women's writing during the Revolutionary period. Following David Shields' groundbreaking *Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America*,<sup>10</sup> which examines elite literary circles, I too seek to understand the aesthetics and "modes of communication" which "instructed politics in private society" (*Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* xiv). Few scholars, however, have examined such dynamics of political commentary and manuscript circulation in religious communities. Shields explains his admittedly brief considerations of religious belletristic discourse by claiming, "Christian belletrism could not resolve the contradiction inherent

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<sup>9</sup> For other criticism which discusses literary sorority and writings in Moore's circle, see Susan M. Stabile's *Memory's Daughters: The Material Culture of Remembrance in Eighteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004) and Angela Vietto's *Women and Authorship in Revolutionary America* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 19-36. Some work has been written on the individual authors and texts included in Moore's compilation. . For discussions of some poems by Wright not found in *Moore's Book*, see Catherine La Courreye Blecki's and Loretta Treese's "Susanna Wright's 'The Grove': A Philosophic Exchange with James Logan" in *Early American Literature* 38.2 (2003), 239-55 and Pattie Cowell's "'Womankind Call Reason to Their Aid': Susanna Wright's Verse Epistle on the Status of Women in Eighteenth-Century America" in *Signs* 6.4 (1981), 795-800. For analyses of the Fergusson writings transcribed into *Moore's Book*, see Parrish 219-22. Mary Kelley references Moore's circle as an informal precursor to female academies. See *Learning to Stand & Speak: Women, Education, and Public Life in America's Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 115-7 and 133-4.

<sup>10</sup> For another excellent example, see Fredrika J. Teute's "The Loves of the Plants; or, the Cross-Fertilization of Science and Desire at the End of the Eighteenth Century" in *Huntington Library Quarterly* 63.3 (2000): 319-45.

in yoking the sublime, a profoundly individual experience of elevation and terror, with the polite, a profoundly social experience of the *sensus communis*" (*Civil Tongues and Polite Letters in British America* 236). While Moore may not explicitly consider the "contradiction" that Shields identifies, *Moore's Book* suggests that the sublime and the polite could be resolved through a different understanding of community, one which places friendship and piety simultaneously at its center, thereby formulating polite discourse as necessarily emerging from the divine even if its conversational subject is not. Therefore, I see this chapter as building upon Shields's scholarly work because it identifies parallel conversational communities and because it provides one answer to an open question that his project suggests.

This chapter also contributes to scholarship about women's writing during the Revolutionary period because it shows how an elite woman justified and authorized her political interventions. Such influential studies as Bernard Bailyn's *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* and Michael Warner's *The Letters of the Republic* see publications as generative texts, capable of defining and spreading community as well as fomenting revolution. Yet they largely ignore women's responses to political ideology and their contributions to the community-engendering possibilities of texts, perhaps because much of their writing appears in manuscript texts rather than print. Other scholars have reinserted women into the critical conversation about revolutionary politics,<sup>11</sup> but more work is still required to expose the nuances and variations of women's

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<sup>11</sup> For monographs which deal directly or partially with women's writing during the Revolutionary Era, see Mary Beth Norton's *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston: Little Brown, 1980), Linda K. Kerber's *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980), Elizabeth Maddock

literary interventions in the period.

This chapter begins that project by focusing upon one variation, *Moore's Book*, and exposing its nuance through religious and generic contextualization. I first provide background about friendship as a religious and affective concept. Next, concentrating upon arrangement and craft, I include an overview of commonplace books. I then turn to the bulk of the chapter, a literary analysis of *Moore's Book*, in two stages; the first explains the textual definition of pious friendship that emerges in the first section of transcriptions, and the second discusses the relationship between that definition of friendship and the secular engagements performed in the final set of transcriptions. Throughout, I use the two other extant manuscript books by Moore to provide points of comparison.

### *Contextualizing Social Love: Friendship, Piety, and Similitude*

I use the term "Friendship" to evoke both the religious relationship advocated by the Society of Friends and the more familiar affective relationship as two intertwined definitions. A faith with an essentially "positive view of mankind" (Frost 12), Quakerism contends that all have the opportunity to personally experience salvation through the Inward Light of Christ, a key tenet of the Society of Friends. Eighteenth-century Friends sought to remove any impediments to this direct, individual experience and therefore practiced an unadorned worship and a lifestyle that emphasized four Testimonies:

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Dillon's *The Gender of Freedom: Fictions of Liberalism and the Literary Public Sphere* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), Angela Vietto's *Women and Authorship in Revolutionary America* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2005), and Sharon M. Harris's *Executing Race: Early American Women's Narratives of Race, Society, and the Law* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005).

Equality, Simplicity, Integrity, and Peace.<sup>12</sup> As the noted seventeenth-century Friend Robert Barclay declares in his influential and frequently reprinted *Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, "[E]very true Christian is a *Child*, a Friend, a *Disciple* of Christ" (47, emphasis in original). This belief in spiritual equality produced a governance structure founded upon radical consensus compared with other faiths of the day. During Meetings, decisions about discipline and policy occurred through the "sense of the Meeting," a process through which both individualism and authoritarianism could be avoided (Barbour and Frost 40).<sup>13</sup> In referring to Friendship, Friends simultaneously denote their equality with each other and their capacity for a personal experience of Christ.<sup>14</sup>

There was a difference, however, between theoretical equality and the practice of Friendship in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania. During this era, Friends became increasingly concerned with the spiritual purity of its existing community than with growing the community through evangelism.<sup>15</sup> This inward focus had not always been the case. Pennsylvania was founded and historically governed by an Assembly dominated by Friends, and it had long been a place where the theology of Friends had

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<sup>12</sup> The simple lifestyle was visible in the plain dress of many Friends. Unadorned worship occurred through the use of Meetings in which Friends gathered and, without hymns or other embellishments, quietly waited to individually experience the Inward Light of Christ. During the Meetings, some Friends did feel compelled by that inward light to speak. For a brief discussion of the Testimonies' sources, meanings, and applications, see Barbour and Frost, 41-6.

<sup>13</sup> The Society structured Meetings through the weekly Local or Particular Meeting, the Monthly Meeting, the Quarterly Meeting, and the Yearly Meeting. With each successive Meeting representing several Meetings from the level below, each level also represented the "sense" of a larger group of Friends. The Yearly Meeting, therefore, was the highest decision making body for its constituent Local, Monthly, and Quarterly Meetings. The most prestigious Yearly Meeting was London with Philadelphia being the most prestigious in the colonies. See Barbour and Frost 77.

<sup>14</sup> For an introduction to Society of Friends theology in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, see Frost's Chapter 1: "The Dry Bones of Quaker Theology" (10-29), Barbour and Frost, especially 3-47 and 95-136, and Thomas D. Hamm's Chapter 2: "The Origins of American Quakerism, 1640-1800" in *The Quakers in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 13-36.

<sup>15</sup> See Barbour and Frost 95-7, 130-1 and Marietta 83-6.

secular applications.<sup>16</sup> In keeping with his theology, Pennsylvania's founder, the Friend William Penn, published a Frame of Government in 1682 which "provided for liberty of conscience," "guaranteed trials by jury," "a stringent moral code," and made "no provision for militia or defense" for the colony (Barbour and Frost 75-6). For many decades, the colony was relatively successful in applying its sectarian roots to its secular requirements. However, by the mid-eighteenth century, Pennsylvania Friends began to withdraw from secular society as a result of internal cleavages over politics, wealth, and indifference to discipline, areas which reform-minded Friends argued distracted the Society's members from what they termed the Truth of Christ. This movement reinvigorated the disciplinary process, and disownments of Friends rose dramatically; it produced "a purified Society of Friends--much more strict, much more divorced from the world, much more consistent" (Barbour and Frost 130).<sup>17</sup>

Another reason for secular withdrawal was the conflict between the military needs of the colony and the Society's testimony of Peace. Although the colony's Friend politicians had long avoided directly supporting a militia, a military crisis in 1755 on the Pennsylvania frontier, in which the French and their Native allies defeated British troops, pushed Friends in the Pennsylvania Assembly to authorize for the first time a defense

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<sup>16</sup> In a 1681 letter to James Harrison, William Penn, founder of Pennsylvania, famously referred to the colony as a "holy experiment" which he hoped would be "an example [. . .] to the nations" (*William Penn and the Founding of Pennsylvania: A Documentary History*, ed. Jean R. Soderlund (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983), 77).

<sup>17</sup> For discussions of mid-eighteenth century discipline and reformation, see Barbour and Frost 107-136 and Marietta. Marietta's detailed study of the reformation indicates that around 40% of disciplinary offenses were marriage offenses, the same offense for which Moore was disowned.



fund and a militia.<sup>18</sup> The Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, the highest decision-making body for the region's Friends, pushed its members to resign from the Assembly while non-Friends, who constituted a majority of the colony's population, saw this as a reason to support non-Friends in the Assembly. What power Pennsylvania's Friends retained in the government ebbed as they politically resisted taking a stand on the American Revolution during the 1760s and 1770s. Rather than explaining voluntary and involuntary secular-withdrawal as a punishment, the Society's reformer leadership praised it; they believed that "God would favor a people who conformed to his ordinances and in effect would raise a wall around to protect them" (Marietta 83). More than simply concerning themselves with implementing stricter standard of practical piety within their community, these reformers envisioned a barrier which would insulate them from the taint of secular society.

The complexity of establishing such a barrier within a secular city is apparent in the history of Philadelphia Friends and slavery. A number of Philadelphia Friends had been outspoken against slavery in the colony's early years, yet they were viewed largely as troublemakers (Marietta 111-2). In this regard, the new climate of reform was much more open to abolition within the community. In the years between 1754 and 1774, a strict official stance against slaveholding and trade gradually emerged as did an

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<sup>18</sup> The fact that some of France's Native allies had previously been allies with Pennsylvania added to the Assembly's surprise about the British troops' defeat and to their swift turn towards military funding. The colony's long policies of negotiation and friendship with the area's Native populations had been one reason the Assembly could justify the absence of a militia, despite the frequently poor application of those policies on the frontier where colonists disagreed with the official stance. See Barbour and Frost 124-7.

environment of decreasing leniency towards violators.<sup>19</sup> However, discipline was not entirely successful. As Gary B. Nash's has shown, a higher percentage of Philadelphia area Friends were slaveholders than non-Friends (253). He remarks, "The evidence is substantial, then, that when faced with a direct choice between forgoing the human labor they needed or ignoring the principles enunciated by their leaders and officially sanctioned by the Society through its Quarterly and Yearly Meetings, the rank and file of Philadelphia Friends chose the latter course" (254). In 1776, the Society decided to disown those who still would not manumit their slaves. Whether for this reason or another, the advent of the American Revolution marked the point at which many Philadelphia Friends finally obeyed.

Long before it strongly advocated against slave-owning, the Society encouraged slave owners to be responsible for the religious education of their slaves and provided for the religious education of free black people. In addition to permitting Africans and African Americans to attend their weekly Meetings for worship, Philadelphia Friends established a separate "Meeting for Negroes" in 1756.<sup>20</sup> However, as Thomas D. Hamm observes, this religious benevolence did not amount to membership for black people: "Even as Friends concluded that slavery was wrong, they were slow to embrace black people as full members of the Society of Friends. Only after considerable discussion was

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<sup>19</sup> With the support of Society leadership, John Woolman published his famous pamphlet *Some Considerations on the Keeping of Negroes* in 1754. In 1755, the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting officially ordered Friends to stop participating in the slave trade. In 1758, the Meeting decided to exclude Friends who practiced slave trading from business meetings. In 1774, it resolved "to completely disown any Friend who bought, sold, or transferred slaves" and provided instructions for gradual emancipation (Marietta 120).

<sup>20</sup> Philadelphia abolished this Meeting in 1805, apparently because by this time independent African American churches were operating in the city. See Henry J. Cadbury's "Negro Membership in the Society of Friends" in *The Journal of Negro History* 21.2 (1936), 153.

the first African American member, Abigail Franks, received into Philadelphia Yearly Meeting in 1784. A few others followed over the next eighty years" (170). These disparities in attitudes towards slavery and black people expose the contested character of Friendship.

In contrast to this religious version of friendship as informed by Friendly piety, the more familiar form of friendship is an affective one. Despite the familiarity of the term, Ivy Schweitzer argues for its intricacy in her study of friendship in early America. Historicizing friendship, Schweitzer explains that "equality and likeness are requirements for and thus constitutive elements of perfect friendship, which produce a fiction or illusion of interchangeability" (28). With its definition and requirements visible in the period's writings by elite white men, she then questions how "women and people of color" could deploy friendship in order to "produce rhetorical equality" (28). Therefore, friendship as an affective relationship contains elements of predictability and pliancy; one is friends with those who are similar *and* one can decide who is similar by defining which traits matter to friendship. Both the religious and affective forms of friendship underscore that exploring pious friendship as defined within *Moore's Book* requires a consideration of how piety constructs similarity and authorizes communal exclusions.

### *Commonplace Books: Arrangement and Craft*

Commonplace books are compilations of texts transcribed, but typically not authored, by a single person. Transcribers include those texts which they find interesting, meaningful, amusing, or otherwise worth saving. In the eighteenth century,

commonplacing was often used as a component of education; a student might be required to maintain a commonplace book or design its arrangement, as well as given specific texts to include. Commonplacing promised to teach students content, organization, and handwriting. Such books also had a manifestly social goal, for compilers would frequently circulate their manuscripts amongst friends and acquaintances.<sup>21</sup>

In a classically conceived commonplace book, arrangement and selection are equally important components. During the Renaissance, such figures as Agricola and Erasmus repopularized this classic art of commonplacing, a practice originally suggested by Aristotle and elaborated upon by other Greek and Roman philosophers. Erasmus's *De Copia* advised students of rhetoric first to list useful *topoi* or places, such as virtues or vices, and then to compile examples under each *topos*. Through *topoi*, one textually and mentally arranged knowledge for easier study and recall during argument.<sup>22</sup> John Locke later proposed using a special index to organize a commonplace book under various subjects.<sup>23</sup> While many faithfully followed such models for organization and content, eighteenth-century commonplace books had the "same great variety of subject matter and

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<sup>21</sup> For an example of an analysis of commonplace books in the Renaissance, see Ann Moss's *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996). For a study of two eighteenth-century American commonplace books, see Kenneth Lockridge's *On the Sources of Patriarchal Rage: The Commonplace Books of William Byrd and Thomas Jefferson and the Gendering of Power in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 1992). For a study of the Virginia Historical Society's commonplace books, see Susan Miller's *Assuming the Positions: Cultural Pedagogy and the Politics of Commonplace Writing* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1998). For an overview of commonplace books from classical to modern times, see Havens. For a study of commonplace books within nineteenth-century American popular culture, see Todd S. Gernes "Recasting the Culture of Ephemera" in *Popular Literacy: Studies in Cultural Practices and Poetics*, ed. John Trimbur (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001), 107-27.

<sup>22</sup> See Desiderius Erasmus's *On Copia of Words or Ideas*, trans. Donald B. King and H. David Rix (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1999), 67-8.

<sup>23</sup> See "A New Method of Common-Place-Book" in *The Works of John Locke*, vol. II (London: Routledge/Thoemmes Press, 1997), 441-59.

hodgepodge of organizational techniques encountered in exemplars from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries" (Havens 81).<sup>24</sup> For Friends, who valued a personal experience of God, the transcription of spiritual and instructional texts into a commonplace book was an appropriate activity, especially on the Sabbath. For members of an elite literary circle, commonplacing was a way to generate conversation and circulate ideas as well as preserve the manuscript productions, some of which were improvisational, of a salon or other belletristic gathering. Of course, no matter the source or impetus behind a commonplace book, organization is always an important element. Even inattentiveness to organization indicates the attitude of a compiler -- who perhaps copies for enjoyment more than usefulness -- towards transcription and content.

In addition to being examined in terms of selection and organization, commonplace books can be studied as material objects. Such an analysis could connect to a variety of scholarly conversations, including those about collecting, nostalgia, and memory-making.<sup>25</sup> However, due to Moore's affiliation with the Society of Friends, I believe a more productive approach is to place her work within eighteenth-century Friends' material culture. In his discussion of Friends as producers, Bernard L. Herman declares that "Quaker material culture" shares the themes of "kinship, community, craft, and consensus" (149). Material objects could be used to "achiev[e] and articulat[e] consensus" within a community of Friends (Herman 153). Herman further explains that

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<sup>24</sup> Havens notes, "At least ten different editions of Lockean commonplace book templates were published long after the philosopher's death, between 1770 and 1820, on both sides of the Atlantic, some bearing extensive manuscript entries from classical as well as contemporary sources" (58).

<sup>25</sup> For a study of collecting, see Susan M. Pearce's *On Collecting: An Investigation in Collecting in the European Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1995). For a study of nostalgia, see Susan Stewart's *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993). For a study of memory-making which particularly focuses upon Moore's literary circle, see Stabile.

craftsmanship permitted Friends to mark their social distinctiveness and status: "[T]here is the sense that Quakers elevated the art of craftsmanship in the production of their material world[. . . C]raftsmanship functioned as a kind of surrogate value system for fashion; that is, craft was the proper vehicle for the expression of worldly attainment" (151). Like friendship, a commonplace book within such a tradition could model the rules of affiliation and their connections to religion, class, gender, and race. The appreciation of a Friend-authored commonplace book requires scrutiny of its textually-defined community and kinships as well as their limits.<sup>26</sup>

Although *Moore's Book* does not follow a classical strategy -- she does not include Erasmus's topic headings or Locke's subject-driven index -- it seems consciously composed, especially when compared to the "loose" organization of her Testimony Book (Blecki 63).<sup>27</sup> She used a clear and regular script, included a catchword at the bottom of pages, added flourishes between entries, and provided marginal brackets for triple rhymes. Her transcriptions are clean and generally accurate (Blecki 64-5).<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, almost every entry identifies the selection's title and author or, when a text follows another by the same author, has a title and "by the same." This last aspect contrasts with her *Miscellanies*. In that publication, she apologizes for frequently not listing authors and excuses her lapse by mentioning that she copied the "extracts" "some

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<sup>26</sup> Stewart's and Stabile's monographs perhaps overstate the nostalgia of such productions. In addition to arguing that eighteenth-century women's commonplace books such as *Moore's Book* "created landscapes of memory," as Stabile does (15), we should also realize the immediacy of such texts for their authors and readers. *Moore's Book* invites engagement with the now and, through the constitution and deployment of social love, models for others how to do so.

<sup>27</sup> Though Blecki also compares the arrangements of *Moore's Book* and *Devotional*, I do not since I believe the latter more resembles a spiritual diary than a commonplace book. Its organization and *topoi* would necessarily be less important than the inspiration and requirements of the moment.

<sup>28</sup> My own comparison of several poems shows that she did transcribe carefully, but also made changes in terms of capitalizations, abbreviations, and, less frequently, punctuation.

years ago" (Moore iii). Because at that time she "collected" only for "her own perusal and amusement," it was no longer "in her power to supply the omission" (Moore iii). All these markers of careful transcription point to *Moore's Book* as a crafted material object whose arrangement and circulation were central concerns.

Even though Moore did not create the writings in her book, it is worthy of study because, as a whole, the book itself is a crafted act of editorship and thus, in my opinion, authorship. She selected the texts, a meaningful activity in light of the abundance of possibilities, and apparently arranged them, thereby skillfully producing a material object. Even if she did not plan the book in its entirety at the outset, there is a purpose to the arrangement of entries as each one influenced the selection of the next or, at a minimum, entered into a juxtapositional conversation with those texts nearby. Therefore, content *and* organization are featured in my argument. Close readings of individual texts will occur alongside attention to textual juxtapositions. I will discuss how these juxtapositions produce questions and suggest arguments about friendship, and how they help create and refine a type of community which responds to the Revolutionary climate.

- **The "purer Pleasures" of Friendship: Piety's Place in Community**

In her introduction, Blecki identifies five sections in *Moore's Book*. In my analysis, I roughly follow her divisions in order to consider how individual juxtapositions and larger components of the book's structure constitute and deploy pious friendship. The five sections Blecki identifies are as follows: the first section preserves Susanna Wright's poetry and honors her poetic correspondence with Hannah Griffitts (MMMB 1-

26),<sup>29</sup> the second acts as a transition (MMMMB 27-29), the third is a set of poems by Griffitts (MMMMB 30-47), the fourth is a series of mostly prose texts by a variety of Friends and non-Friends (MMMMB 48-70), and the final section is another set of mostly Griffitts poems (MMMMB 71-126) (Blecki 67-9). My argument will center primarily upon juxtapositions in the first and last sections since my concern is not with all the nuances of *Moore's Book*, but specifically with friendship and its uses. This sentiment emerges from the confluence of femininity, piety, and politics, themes addressed in the most sustained fashion in the first and final sections.

### *Defining Friendship*

The first section, preserving Wright's poetry and honoring her poetic correspondence with Griffitts, develops an argument about friendship that serves as a conceptual foundation to the remainder of the text. The first entry of the Wright section is the 160-line poem "An Essay on Friendship" (MMMMB 1), written by the Friend Hannah Griffitts (1727-1817), Moore's unmarried cousin. The poem prominently discloses friendship as a theme of the section as well as the entire commonplace book. The poem's opening line, "The Friend requires, & friendship does demand / At least th' attempt from my inferior Hand," characterizes friendship as insistent (*Moore's Book* 115). In expanding upon friendship's characterization, the poem instructs the reader to keep "[a] noble unaffected Piety" at its "Centre" (*Moore's Book* 115). This line not only highlights

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<sup>29</sup> The editors of *Moore's Book* have numbered the entries consecutively. To clarify references to works, I frequently follow mentions of entries with a parenthetical citation that includes the abbreviation MMMB and an entry number or range of entry numbers. First mentions of texts located in *Milcah Martha Moore's Book* are always followed by such a note. Even if other versions of transcribed texts exist, I quote Moore's versions.



the centrality of piety to friendship, but also, through the use of the word "unaffected" (meaning both genuine and not influenced by feeling<sup>30</sup>), suggests that friendship should be essentially unemotional because of its reliance upon piety. Following upon this assertion of friendship's core, the poem continues with additional criteria that supplement the "chief" virtue of piety and direct the practice of friendship:

The other Virtues, here may claim a Place  
This is the chief & this alone the Base,  
The Bond to strengthen, it requires we find,  
Similitude of Passions & of Mind,  
Alike in Tempers, as alike in Love,  
Mutual their Faith & Confidence to improve  
By sympathetic Tenderness are known  
And feel each others Sorrows like their own,  
Kind to their Failings, to their Virtues Just  
With watchful Care they guard the sacred trust,  
A feeling Heart, a sympathizing Soul  
Can with a friend in all their Grievs condole  
Joy when they Joy, & when they sorrow, mourn  
Sighs to their Sighs, & Tears to theirs return,  
In Silence weep, & bear the tender Part,  
That wounds the Soul & melts the bleeding Heart,

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<sup>30</sup> See "unaffected" in the *OED*.

For oh! in every Grief their Friend has known,

It strikes as deep & pains them as their own[.] (*Moore's Book* 115-6)

These rules indicate that similarity of temperament and opinion as well as reciprocity of feeling supplement and "strengthen" friendship. They also indicate that, because such similarities allow friends to know each other more precisely, they are necessary not so much for pleasure's sake, but because they deepen the piety of the friendship itself and "guard the sacred trust." Later in the poem, Griffiths furthers this characterization of friendship as guide and guard:

True friends we find in Union of the Soul

Are like the constant Needle to the Pole

And ever fixing there, whose guiding Ray

Directs the Trav'ler in the dubious Way[.] (*Moore's Book* 117)

Friends who share piety and unite at the level of their souls can guide each other and, perhaps, other "Trav'ler[s]" as well who may be able to observe a pious friendship as a type of compass.

While the many references to tenderness and emotions could undermine the earlier suggestion that a friendship based upon "unaffected Piety" is essentially untouched by feeling, together these lines underscore that friendship is a rational choice made by a pious person and that emotion itself serves the rational function of furthering one's piety.

The remainder of the first section continues to develop a characterization of friendship based upon piety. The next twenty-two poems, apparently arranged chronologically, are all by Susanna Wright (1695-1785), an esteemed Friend who resided

on the Pennsylvania frontier in Chester County about eighty-five miles from Philadelphia. Never marrying, she wrote poetry, experimented with silkworms and other areas of horticulture, engaged in political campaigning, acted as a secretary for the local magistrate, and exchanged letters and books with friends back in Philadelphia such as Benjamin Franklin and members of the prominent Norris and Logan families (Blecki and Wulf xvi).<sup>31</sup> For Moore, Wright appears to have been "a kind of elder stateswoman" (Wulf "Documenting Culture" 27). The transition from a poem about friendship to an entire series of poems by an acquaintance also suggests that Moore views Wright as a friend.

The first Wright poem is the undated "*A Meditation*" (MMMMB 2),<sup>32</sup> a poem that uses Matthew 12:40 and the story of Jonah to contemplate personal suffering, sin, and Christian salvation.<sup>33</sup> Yet the first line of "*A Meditation*" also appears to continue "An Essay on Friendship": "Where shall I this unfathom'd Secret find / Of what thou art?" (*Moore's Book* 119). In its use of the words "this" and "thou," and its lack of direct indication of antecedents, Wright's "*A Meditation*" and its placement after Griffiths' poem implies that Wright's poem continues the conversation about friendship, begun by Griffiths, with the above question. In other words, in arranging her book, Moore seems to performatively propose a question through Wright's poem: where can I find the

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<sup>31</sup> For a more detailed biography of Wright and her family, see Elizabeth Meg Schaefer's *Wright's Ferry Mansion* Vol. I (Columbia: von Hess Foundation, 2005), 25-70.

<sup>32</sup> The poem may follow "An Essay on Friendship" because it is the earliest Wright poem chronologically or Moore may have more deliberately juxtaposed the two texts. Based upon those texts which have dates, the Wright poems other than the closing poetic conversation, appear to be arranged chronologically.

<sup>33</sup> Matthew 12:40 states, "For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." This verse uses the story of Jonah to prefigure Jesus' resurrection. The actual story of Jonah is found in the Book of Jonah in the Old Testament.

"unfathom'd Secret" of friendship? Since the remainder of "*A Meditation*" is a poem meditating upon the story of Jonah, a man who finds God in the belly of a great fish, Moore may be indicating that one can find the source of friendship through solitary religious contemplation. In doing so, she points the reader back to Griffiths' core principle of friendship: piety.

In this analysis, I am not arguing that Wright's poem alone is about something other than its explicit consideration of original sin and Christian salvation. Instead, I am proposing that the prominent juxtaposition of "An Essay on Friendship" and "*A Meditation*" underscores piety's central place within friendship. Friendship as suggested by these two initial texts in *Moore's Book*, therefore, advances that friendship, properly defined, emerges from and confirms, perhaps even deepens, one's piety. In this formulation, participation in friendship manifests one's individual spirituality. It also suggests that a particular friendship's strength and virtue lies in the piety of its members.

This argument about friendship is not only general, but also specific to the friendship on display in this book -- currently including at a minimum Wright, Griffiths, and Moore -- because this first section so prominently relies upon texts by Wright, a woman and Friend well-known and admired for her piety.<sup>34</sup> Unlike other commonplace book authors who organize around virtues or themes (*topoi*), Moore has unexpectedly focused upon an individual author. By including Wright's work, *Moore's Book* makes the preservation of an elder woman's authorship her *topos*. Since virtuous friendship depends

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<sup>34</sup> In her 1784 death notice, the *Pennsylvania Gazette* wrote, "Possessed of an elevated understanding, improved by acquired knowledge to an eminent degree, she was distinguished by her superior benevolence, evinced by a multitude of pious and charitable offices done in the course of her long life, towards those within her beneficent sphere" (as qtd. in Schaefer 65).

upon the piety of its members and since the most visible member of the friendship community on display in this first section is Wright, Wright's pious reputation adds authority to *Moore's Book* and its formulation of friendship. Furthermore, by textually participating in this friendship community, Moore associates that piety with herself.<sup>35</sup>

Of course, piety and friendship are not equally vital. In Moore's view, piety precedes friendship and, if a choice is necessary, one should choose the former over the latter. While the poems above suggest this point, it is most forcefully borne out by the contents of her devotional. This small volume contains few pieces, most of which were likely authored by her since she refers to no other author and some entries include references to her own circumstances. As the book is dated 1776, it was composed while Moore was disowned by the Society and, most likely, while she was living in Montgomery. In keeping with the devotional style, it focuses upon solitary contemplation. For example, in the first entry, "Happiness," she rejects worldly gratifications: "Nothing short of eternal Life can be called Happiness, the Smiles of the World and its poor perishing Delights are not worth one serious thought. My Soul longs after purer Pleasures, -- after more sweet and unmix'd Enjoyments. -- Seek the Lord then, Oh! my Soul, and rejoice in him alone."<sup>36</sup> Here, happiness is specifically spiritual. Because her commonplace book, *Moore's Book*, submits that the joy of friendship arises from the piety of its members, friendship for Moore may be satisfying because it contains a suggestion of those "purer Pleasures" which await her in the "eternal Life" of heaven.

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<sup>35</sup> This poem is not the only place where Moore appears to assert her own piety through textual transcription. The very existence of her Testimony Book and its many, many entries of Friendly writings seems to be a continual statement of Friendly identity on her part, despite her disownment.

<sup>36</sup> See Ms. 975B, the Quaker Collection, Haverford College, Haverford.

Numerous passages in the devotional reveal the preeminent importance of friendship. For example, in one entry, she criticizes herself for dwelling upon her and her husband's isolation:

Let me not repine at being thus disown'd by them nor suffer a resentful  
Breath to escape me, or an unkind Thought to arise in my Heart but may I  
rather love them the more, & rejoice in Tribulation, as it may be a happy  
Means of my drawing still nearer to thee (whom I humbly trust we have  
not offended past Forgiveness) - Oh! what a glorious exchange will it be,  
if by loosing the Name, we should [be] brought to inherit the Substance, &  
be join'd & united more firmly than ever to the Lord, in a durable  
everlasting Fellowship, that the World cannot disturb.

While this entry clearly exposes Moore's desire to belong to community, it also exposes her ability to find consolation for friendship's absence in prayer.<sup>37</sup> The preference of piety, even solitary piety, over friendship is therefore elaborated both in the transcription of Wright's "*A Meditation*" and in Moore's most personal contemplations.

As was shown by "An Essay on Friendship," friendship's piety requires reciprocity of feeling. Other poems in this first section of *Moore's Book* indicate when reciprocity of feeling, and even the friendship itself, should end. All the poems explicitly about friendship refer to its end, whether due to death or another reason. Poems such as "An Essay on Friendship" and Wright's elegy "To the Memory of Charles Norris"

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<sup>37</sup> In another telling moment, Moore compares herself to the Biblical Martha. When Jesus comes to her home, Martha focuses upon hospitality while her sister, Mary, humbly listens at Jesus's feet. Jesus criticizes Martha and tells her to be more like her sister. See Luke 38-41.

(MMMMB 23) illustrate directly or indirectly that humanity's mortality means that friendship itself is temporal and that friends who survive another's death are left behind to mourn. Death is a natural end to friendship. Yet when friendship interferes with personal piety, it should end during life as well.

For example, Wright's "On Friendship" (MMMMB 22), muses upon the end of friendship after first honoring the subject of friendship generally and specifically as a worthy topic, next reiterating a central Christian argument (God is love), and then proclaiming that a friend "colours all our Days with Happiness" (*Moore's Book* 144).

Towards the end of the poem, she confesses:

But if my Friends too dang'rous Blessings prove,  
And I grow giddy with excess of Love,  
Or if they change, -- which too, too much I fear,  
For Frailty is to human Nature, near,  
How shall I stand a Tryal so severe?  
When of my Friends, or of their Love, depriv'd,  
I'll all resign -- for long enough I've liv'd. (*Moore's Book* 145)

These lines indicate that friendship may end when friends impede one's virtue or are themselves less than virtuous. Because the lines are ambiguous in regards to frailty, perhaps referring to changeable friends or perhaps referring to the speaker's inability to withstand such changes, they indicate that the friendship's frailty has an impact on all members. When Wright declares that "When of my Friends, or of their Love, depriv'd, / I'll all resign," Wright appears to assert that she will "resign" not only the friendship, but

also possibly life itself if a seemingly true friendship should prove false. This poem implies that friendship can be a precarious choice and must be cautiously undertaken.

The articulation of these characteristics of friendship -- pious and by extension reciprocal and temporal -- culminates in the first section with a conversation. This conversation occurs in a poetic exchange that concludes the section; the first poem is Wright's meditation upon her 64th birthday in 1761, the second is Griffitts' response, and the third and final poem of this exchange and the section is Wright's response to Griffitts. While the poem initiating the exchange is not explicitly about friendship, the poems which follow, as I will show, model friendship and hint at its uses. In Wright's poem "My own Birth Day.-- August 4th 1761" (MMMB 24), she begins not with her first or most recent birthday, but steps backward to Biblical times and the ancestors of Israel:

Were few & Evil stil'd the Patriarchs Days,  
Extended to a Length of Years unknown  
In this luxurious Age whose swift Decays,  
Allow to few so many as my own.  
And what are they? -- a Vision all the past,  
A Bubble on the Waters shining Face,  
What yet remain 'till the first transient Blast  
Shall leave no more Remembrance of their Place.

*(Moore's Book 147-8)*

In these lines, the long lives of Old Testaments figures were often "Evil" and "unknown." The present is subject to "swift Decays" and "transient Blast[s]," two characterizations



that not only indicate mortality, but also the suddenness with which events and people can be forgotten. Wright then notes the sorrows of loss in her own life and, turning to her Christian faith, reassures herself that through her soul's immortality "[t]he mortal shall surpass the natal Day" (*Moore's Book* 149).

In response, Griffiths does not deny Wright's claims in her poem "To Susa. Wright" (MMMB25). Instead, she offers the consolation of poems and songs to help with life and dying. Griffiths maintains that "Amidst these Cares that crow'd the human Throng, / Serenely glows Venera's evening Ray, / She wakes her Lyre to Harmony of Song, / And smooths the awful Passage of Decay" (*Moore's Book* 150). These lines do not refer explicitly to Wright's writings or even Griffiths' own. Instead, they note Venera's song as being the soothing strains to one's passage from painful life and old age into death. Venera, a Latin term for Venus, shines in the dark sky and produces the "Harmony of Song" that "smooths the awful Passage of Decay." These lines align feminine poetic composition with Christian faith as possible sites of consolation.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Griffiths' choice of Venera is unusual. When referring to poetic inspiration, the muses and their mother Mneme (memory) were more frequently invoked, especially Calliope, the chief of the muses. Eighteenth-century British North America associated Venus with sexual pleasure and eroticism, not with poetic inspiration. Most references to Venus include some discussion of sexuality. For example, Pierre Gautruche's *The Poetical History: Being a Compleat Collection of all the Stories Necessary for a Perfect Understanding of the Greek and Latin Poets*, refers to "Sicca Venera near Carthage, an infamous place dedicated to this Goddess, where the Women did freely abandon themselves to their Lusts, and to the pleasure of Men for a Reward" (103). One text which directly addresses sexuality and old age is Cicero's *Major de Senectute*. Franklin, a person whose literary circles were similar to Griffiths', published a translation of Cicero's work in 1744 (see *M. T. Cicero's Cato Major, or His Discourse of Old-Age: with Explanatory Notes* (Philadelphia: B. Franklin, 1744)). According to this translation, attributed to James Logan, Franklin's friend and a relation to Griffiths and Moore, "It is alledged that Old Age is not sensible to that Titillation of Pleasure, that is found in the other Parts of Life; which is certainly true: But at the same time it has this great Advantage to ballance it, that it does not so much as wish to have it. *Sophocles* said well, who, when he was asked at a great Age, whether he had yet any Acquaintance with *Venus*, answered, Heavens forbid! I thank the Gods I am got rid of that Tyranny" (99). Contrary to *Sophocles* who is grateful to be done with Venus's "Tyranny" in his old age, Griffiths' poem suggests that Venus and even perhaps one's relationship to the erotic are one of the sole consolations towards the end of a long life.

Griffitts' proposes that one's sensitivity to Venus's inspiration increases as one ages, especially in the case of Wright. She praises Wright's still sharp mind and writes:

Distinguish'd view in this superior Mind,  
The Fire of Wit matur'd by ripening Age,  
And striking Sense with soft Submission join'd.  
Inspires Venera's animated Page. (*Moore's Book* 150)

However, Wright rejects Griffitts' praise in the final poem of the exchange, "S.W. to Fidelia. In answer to the foregoing" (MMMMB 26).<sup>39</sup> She declares that her "ebbing Spirits languid flow" and describes "Fancy's drooping Wing" as "Unplum'd by Time" and unable to "rise / To seek a second Spring" (*Moore's Book* 151). Instead, it is "Faiths" and "gentle Hope" that "sustain" the "immortal Mind" which, "Unconscious of Decay, / Feels all her Powers of Action Strong" (*Moore's Book* 151).<sup>40</sup> Wright's poem insists that it is Griffitts' herself who has the "Spark of Fire divine" and whose poetry "glow[s]." Therefore, the text both appears to designate a poetic heir and delineates between Wright's own community of the past and Griffitts' community of the present. Wright further emphasizes this generational division in the closing lines of the poem:

Thy Mothers social Hour was mine,  
As kindred Minds allied.  
Such wou'd thou be, cou'd youth to Age,  
The engaging Hand extend;

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<sup>39</sup> Fidelia was Griffitts' frequently-used poetic pseudonym.

<sup>40</sup> While her language suggests that the quill of her authorship is unable to access the vigor of its past inspirations, the existence of this poem belies her statement and instead attests to her continued ability to write.

Such wou'd I prize the tender Tye,

And fondly call thee Friend. (*Moore's Book* 151).

In these final lines, Wright aligns herself generationally and affectively with Griffitts' mother and laments the impossibility of true friendship with a much younger Griffitts. This poetic exchange suggests that Griffitts offers friendship and that, in response, Wright gently rejects that friendship while simultaneously educating Griffitts about its constitution. Griffitts attempts to exhibit true friendship by first sympathizing with but not denying Wright's painful experience of age and then introducing the consolation of poetry. Yet Wright, in adhering to "Thy Mothers social Hour," appears to refuse to deny friendship's mortality, perhaps because that might undermine the truth of her earlier friendships. In both honoring the divinely-ordained mortality of friendship and in insisting that "Faith" "softens [her] Pain," she emphasizes the piety instead of the comfort of friendship. In gently educating Griffitts about friendship, Wright builds upon her own participation in a friendship community and then offers her learning and experience to another within her community while still maintaining the sanctity of her own affiliations. In transcribing this poem, Moore suggests that one use of friendship is to instruct others in its constitution.

While any true friend might be capable of educating others about friendship, this first section's exclusive use of feminine authorship gives women particular authority in doing so. Having been raised a Friend and having maintained a close affiliation even after her disownment, Moore had spent her life steeped in a culture that valued women as prominent members of the religious community, one that even permitted them to leave

their husbands and children in order to travel as sanctioned itinerant preachers throughout the transatlantic region. Moreover, the governmental structure of the Society of Friends progressively included separate Women's Meetings in which women administered those areas deemed appropriate for their control.<sup>41</sup> In fact, Friends saw the hierarchical relationship between men and women as an earthly experience which would disappear in the afterlife, and they philosophically if not always practically "stressed the unity of genders" (Larson 20). Moore seems to have agreed with the Society's esteem for women's spirituality and leadership. In a letter from 1785, she describes a visit from Jemima Wilkins, a Friend and preacher.<sup>42</sup> She and her husband allowed Wilkins to use their orchard as a meeting space, brought over benches from their school, and hosted her at their home. Moreover, almost half the entries in her other extant manuscript commonplace book, her Testimony Book, are authored by women.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, the authority that *Moore's Book* finds in women's voices agrees with her religious experiences and beliefs.

Certain tensions remain on the subject of friendship in the commonplace book at the end of the Wright section. While the real friendship between Griffiths and Wright has been undercut by the final poem, a textual friendship has also been implied. This friendship includes not only Griffiths and Wright, but Moore herself. This section also

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<sup>41</sup> For a discussion of women's ability to speak, see influential Friend Margaret Fell's *Women's Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed by the Scriptures* . . . (London: N. pub., 1666). Also see Larson 30-34 and 227-30. Margaret Hope Bacon's *Mothers of Feminism: The Story of Quaker Women in America* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986) provides a history of the Society of Friends' proto-feminism and feminism.

<sup>42</sup> See Milcah Martha Moore, letter, 22 March 1785, Edward Wanton Smith box 955, Haverford College Quaker Collection, Haverford.

<sup>43</sup> The first four entries in the Testimony Book are also by women.

illustrates the characteristics of true friendship as argued for by the poems when viewed collectively. First, the poems themselves repeatedly indirectly or directly address questions of piety. Second, in preserving poems written by Griffiths and Wright, Moore seems to revere her friends and to engage in an act of reciprocity. In this way, she suggests her respect for the demanding nature of pious friendship. Finally, the commonplace book itself is a temporal object. As an unpublished manuscript apparently intended for circulation, its potential longevity would parallel the longevity of Moore's community itself. Despite its apparently impermanent nature, the book conveys a sense of authority in this first section, in part because it models a pious friendship. The intimacy and moral authority of true friendship established in this first section informs, as I will show, the arguments about the larger community made later in the work.

### *Friendship's Political Usefulness*

For the remainder of this chapter, I will consider one way in which the book applies the tenets of pious friendship to the larger community by taking into account the inter- and intra-community schisms experienced by the Society of Friends during the Revolutionary period. I examine the book to demonstrate how pious friendship permeates its arguments about community in general and even elicits political discussion. The book advocates what I call a friendship community, an impersonal intimacy modeled upon friendship. Taking into account the fragmented Revolutionary Era during which the book was compiled, I show that this friendship community is the alternative to the politically divided society within which Moore lived. In my analysis, I examine

specifically the final, longest section of poems since the political commentary is most visible and dense in this section.<sup>44</sup>

Moore devotes most of the last section to the work of Hannah Griffitts, but also includes other texts. Generally, the explicitly political texts acknowledge colonial rights, value freedom, and deplore British oppression, but also protest against the violence of revolution and point out the hypocrisy of patriots' tyranny over those who disagree. Therefore, the poems reflect a generally neutral and pacifist stance towards the American Revolution, and "capture . . . the sentiments of many Quakers" (Wulf "Documenting Culture" 41). While this section of *Moore's Book* unquestionably has the greatest density of political concerns, therefore perhaps signaling Moore's increasing absorption with politics, she also includes a number of Griffitts' elegies, meditations upon various virtues, and odes to friends and family, and signals her continuing absorption with piety and intimacy. The juxtapositions between the overtly political and the seemingly apolitical are instances where Moore creates meaning by arranging politics and intimacy.

The first set of poems I examine demonstrates how the definition of pious friendship facilitates political commentary in *Moore's Book*. The scathing "upon reading a Book entituled Common Sense" (MMMB 86) examines Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* through the critical lens of pious friendship and determines that his argument is unfriendly.<sup>45</sup> In this January 1776 poem, Griffitts addresses Sylvania<sup>46</sup> and warns that

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<sup>44</sup> Such discussion occurs in other portions of the book as well. In fact, the first entry after the Wright section (MMMB 27: "On the Right Honble Willm. Pitt Esqr. by a Female") and the untitled last text before the final section (MMMB 70) are both explicitly about politics. Other examples include "The female Patriots. Address'd to the Daughters of Liberty in America" (MMMB 38) and "New Jail" (MMMB 56).

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Paine was raised as a Friend, perhaps exacerbating Griffitts' contempt for his stirring revolutionary tract. For a discussion of the influence of Friendly ideology on Paine's writings, see William

Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* is a "fallacious tale" whose message is a "Snake beneath the Grass" (*Moore's Book* 255). She reproaches Paine for undermining freedom under the guise of patriotism. She cites aspects of society which have been damaged by his words before turning to a direct attack upon his thesis:

Orders confounded, -- Dignities thrown down,  
Charters degraded equal with the Crown,  
The impartial Press, most partially maintain'd  
Freedom infring'd, & Conscience is restrain'd,  
The moderate Man is held to publick View,  
"The Friend of Tyranny & Foe to you,"  
Deny'd the common Right to represent  
Forbid to give his Reasons for Dissent,  
Whilst base Informers -- (Own'd a public Pest)  
Are round the Land encourag'd & caress'd  
Our Representatives, -- the Peoples Choice  
Are held contemptuous by this daring Voice  
Persons are seiz'd & Posts monopoliz'd  
And all our Form of Government despis'd, --  
-- Then from this "Specimen of Rule" beware  
Behold the Serpent & avoid his Snare.

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C. Kashatus III, *Conflict of Conviction: A Reappraisal of Quaker Involvement n the American Revolution* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1990), 1-34.

<sup>46</sup> Sylvania is likely Pennsylvania.

'Tis not in Names, our present Danger lyes

Sixty as well as one can tyrannize[.] (*Moore's Book* 256)

She passionately enumerates what she sees as hypocrisy in Paine's tract. Many of her criticisms center upon the ways in which, in her eyes, revolutionaries have acted disgracefully towards those who disagree. They have "thrown down" "Dignities." They have "confounded" "Orders"; the word "confounded" indicates that orders have not been followed and have also perhaps been defiled.<sup>47</sup> They are "contemptuous" of the "Peoples Choice." Their behavior contrasts sharply with the intimate reciprocity which supports a pious friendship. In that relationship, as described in "An Essay on Friendship," even a friend who is wrong is "reprove[d] . . . / . . . with the tenderness of love" (*Moore's Book* 118). Since piety is, for Moore, a central tenet of friendship, she implies through the transcription of this poem on Paine that the unfriendly and "tyranniz[ing]" revolutionaries betray the rules of social intimacy and the rules of God. This implication is further suggested when Griffiths declares that "Conscience is restrain'd" within the new political climate.

Turning from critique to instruction, Griffiths concludes by offering advice:

Ah! then awake Sylvania & beware,  
The fatal Danger of this subtle Snare  
Hold fast yr. own, yr. charter'd Rights maintain  
Nor let them weave the Snare into the Chain,  
And whilst firm Union stands the British Foes,

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<sup>47</sup> See "confounded" in the *OED*.



Let not the native Hand yr. Date of Freedom close.-- (*Moore's Book* 256)

In contrast to her characterization of Paine, Griffiths wants Sylvania to "Hold fast yr. own" and remain in "firm Union." She wants to save Sylvania; this sentiment, in her conceptual framework, makes her more friendly than Paine. Yet, even though her reiteration of "Sylvania" highlights that this poem is one woman speaking to another, the tone of command indicates that this poem may not be from one friend to another. The speaker sounds more like a mentor than an equal, thus subtly replicating the Wright-Griffitts relationship. Unlike Paine who, according to the poem, has been an unfriendly supporter of tyranny and who should therefore have no authority with Sylvania, Griffiths' assertive voice and reasoned argument are associated with the instructional authority that arises from participation in a friendship community. Moore's decision to transcribe and thus anthologize the poem only augments its authority.

Moore next transcribes a Griffiths' text from February 1776, "To the Honble. Society of Informers" (MMMB 87), and, through its placement, associates it with the poem about Paine. In doing so, she extends her critique of the unfriendly Paine to include informers. This piece sarcastically provides advice upon how to be a good informer, a "Trade" which has become a possibility for "noble empl[o]y" as "the Flame of Dissention" has increased (*Moore's Book* 256). Contrasting the current political and social climate with a more principled earlier period in which affect and neighborliness structured the community, she declares that being an informer would not have been so fashionable in "the Days of a old fashion'd Virtue . . . / (When Love warm'd the sociable Breast)" (*Moore's Book* 256). She concludes by stating that an informer will have a

"sure" "Reward": "In this Life full Honour attend on thy Trade / And the Balance be clos'd in the other" (*Moore's Book* 257). These final words contend that an informer abdicates not only neighborliness and love on earth but also a heavenly afterlife. Informing is a moral fault; it is impious. Based upon this description, informers cannot be friends and therefore have no place in either a friendship or a friendship community on earth or in the afterlife.

These poetic arguments against the patriots are juxtaposed to elegies praising Friends, an arrangement which heightens the political claims in these poems.<sup>48</sup> "To the Memory of Sarah Morris who died at Philada. Octobr. 24th. 1775" (MMMB 85) appears immediately before "upon reading . . . Common Sense." It eulogizes Morris (1703/4-1775), a transatlantic Friend and preacher who made trips to several American colonies and England. As with other Griffitts poems about speaking Friends, this elegy emphasizes the appropriateness and virtue in publicly proclaiming one's religious principles.<sup>49</sup>

In placing Griffitts' celebration of Morris's ministry before the two political poems, Moore prepares the reader to read sympathetically by associating friendship and instruction. According to the poem, Morris "point[ed] the Path" to others and always, by paying attention to the individual's "State," "Directed" the "Proper Portion" to each person she met (*Moore's Book* 254). This language implies that Morris behaved

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<sup>48</sup> Blecki, identifying this plus one other example of elegiac and political juxtaposition, believes such moments ask the reader to "ponder" whether "the 'good' have left for another world" while "the 'bad' or 'malicious' are still actively (and dangerously) present in colonial America" (67).

<sup>49</sup> Rebecca Larson's study of eighteenth-century female Friends narrates an extensive tradition of preaching women. Larson describes female Friends' call to ministry as being "primarily an internal experience that gave women the certainty that they had been divinely chosen." See Larson 76.

reciprocally towards others, just as a friend would. Griffitts concludes that Morris's "generous Mind" was "Where christian Virtues did with Social blend, / And form'd th' Instructor in the chearful Friend" (*Moore's Book* 254). The fact that becoming an "Instructor" occurs after becoming a "chearful Friend" aligns pedagogy with friendship and, furthermore, suggests that instruction and learning are duties for people who live in a friendly community. In placing this text before the two political entries, Moore not only prepares her reader to be receptive to their authority and arguments, but also couches that reception as a dutiful act.

That encouragement would potentially be stronger if the reader was already familiar with the poem and viewed it as a worthy text. Evidence suggests that the elegy to Morris was a poem read amongst local Friends since it was a text utilized in at least one Society of Friends school. In her study of unmarried women in eighteenth-century Philadelphia, Wulf observes that at least two female students attending a Philadelphia school run by the unmarried Friends Rebecca Jones and Hannah Catherill were given this poem to transcribe into their copybooks as part of their education (*Not All Wives* 47-8). The commonplace book of Catherine Haines, one of those students, includes entries by Joseph Addison, Phillis Wheatley, John Dryden, Mary Leapor, and Alexander Pope, and therefore situates Griffitts' work amongst these published authors.<sup>50</sup> If Griffitts' poem on Sarah Morris was being circulated beyond *Moore's Book*, a reader familiar with that poem would bring a sense of familiarity to *Moore's Book*. Reading a poem from and about women known to the author, the audience would potentially feel united to the

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<sup>50</sup> See *Catherine Haines: Her Book* (Commonplace Book. MS 975A. Quaker Collection, Haverford College, Haverford).

community during the act of reading. The achronological appearance of the poem "To S. Fothergill on his leaving Philada. June 4th. 1756" (MMMB 84) immediately before the Morris poem only adds to this endorsement since it aligns Morris's piety with that of the eminent Friend Samuel Fothergill.<sup>51</sup>

When examined collectively, these three poems, two political and one elegiac, exemplify how the definition of pious friendship advanced in the first section can be used to authorize and structure political commentary. Using the tenets of friendship and displaying friendly and unfriendly subjects, these poems as a group have argued for a version of social intimacy which is a friendship community. Yet the unfriendly subjects, in their lack of piety and disregard for communal reciprocity, appear to have abdicated their ability to join such a community.

Two entries later, another set of texts also uses the tenets of pious friendship to guide political commentary as well as proposes the place of women's friendship communities in providing such commentary. Transitioning briefly away from transcribing Griffitts' poetry, Moore includes two poems by Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson. As Wulf notes, documenting a direct connection between Moore and Fergusson is difficult, especially since Fergusson's circle "was composed primarily of Anglicans" ("Documenting Culture" 31). Fergusson held a heterosocial salon at her home from

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<sup>51</sup> Fothergill was a celebrated Friend, preacher, and leader who visited America from 1754 through 1756. During the Seven Years War (1756-1763), he advocated pacifism. For a brief biography of Fothergill, see Angus J. L. Winchester, "Fothergill, Samuel (1715–1772)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004. 16 May 2008 <<http://www.oxforddnb.com>>). The North American community of Friends greatly admired Fothergill, and his texts were published and circulated amongst American Friends.

approximately 1765 to 1775.<sup>52</sup> Despite the separation between Moore's and Fergusson's literary circle, they did share "socioeconomic status and geographic proximity" and also, most likely, friends and acquaintances ("Documenting Culture" 31). While *Moore's Book* also includes "A few Extracts from E[lizabeth] G[raeme]'s Journal" (MMMB 58) in the fourth section, these two poems are the only other entries by Fergusson, and their insertion into the midst of Griffitts' poetry appears somewhat abrupt, as do the four other brief insertions of works not by Griffitts found at other points in this section.<sup>53</sup>

The first Fergusson poem is "The Invitation" (MMMB 89):

Come dear Amanda, prythee come,  
And share yr. Time with me  
The smiling Hours shall sweetly glide,  
From Noise & Scandal free.  
Thro' lonely Walks, & shady Bowers,  
We may delighted rove,  
Where no Intruders can invade,  
To ruffle gentle Love.  
Cupid<sup>54</sup> shall guard us from all harm,  
And shew his faithful Care,  
As we sit by some murmuring Rill

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<sup>52</sup> For a biography of Fergusson, see Anne M. Ousterhout's *The Most Learned Woman in America: A Life of Elizabeth Graeme Fergusson* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004). For a discussion of Fergusson's literary salon, see Stabile's introduction to *The Most Learned Woman in America*, 1-15 and Shields's *Civil Tongues*, 120-40.

<sup>53</sup> This long section of Griffitts' writings spans MMMB 71-125. Insertions occur at MMMB 82, 89-90, 101-3, 106-7, and 111-114. The final entry, MMMB 126, is also a text not by Griffitts.

<sup>54</sup> Moore notes that Cupid is a "favorite Lap-Dog" (*Moore's Book* 259)

And female Friendship share.  
The Town with all its sprightly Charms,  
Was not ordain'd for me,  
More lasting Happiness is found,  
Beneath a spreading Tree.  
Here sweet Simplicity presides  
And glads the virtuous Heart.  
And rural Elegance around  
Does Nature's Joy's impart.  
Instruction glides in every Brook,  
To sentimental Minds,  
Each Shrub conveys some virtuous Truth  
And earthly Bliss refines. (*Moore's Book* 259)

In this poem, Fergusson, under her poetic pseudonym Laura, invites Amanda to "prythee come / And share yr. Time with me." The remainder of the piece extols the pleasures of female friendship through the use of sensual language that evokes images of the slow and smooth passage of time under "spreading Tree[s]" and beside flowing "Brook[s]."<sup>55</sup> This idyllic portrayal of female friendship and its categorization as a refuge provides a different understanding of that relationship than in other poems explicitly addressing

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<sup>55</sup> Though I do not address the topic here, the subtle eroticism of the poem and its connection to female friendship deserves analysis. For evocative examples of such an analysis, see Lisa L. Moore's fascinating essays "The Swan of Litchfield: Sarah Pierce and the Lesbian Landscape Poem" in *Long before Stonewall: Histories of Same-Sex Sexuality in Early America*, ed. Thomas A. Foster (New York: New York University Press, 2007. 253-78) and "Queer Gardens: Mary Delany's Flowers and Friendships" (*Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39.1 (2005): 49-70).

friendship in *Moore's Book*. Other poems, such as "An Essay on Friendship" as well as Wright's "To a Friend.--On some Misunderstanding" and "On Friendship" (MMMB 21-2) and Griffiths' "Primitive Friendship described" and "Steady Friendship" (MMMB 96, 108), focus upon friendship's piety and demands. Perhaps because it is written by a non-Friend and perhaps because its author was more consciously cosmopolitan, Fergusson's poem focuses instead upon social detachment and pleasure.

Occurring as they do after multiple Griffiths poems which consider the topics of politics, death, preaching, and morality, the changes in topic, treatment of friendship, and author suggest that the poem positionally enacts its theme of retreat. In transcribing the poem, Moore briefly relinquishes the immediacy of contemporary events for the sweet "glide" and "Simplicity" of Fergusson's version of friendship. Susan Scott Parrish explains that the poem's configuration of nature transforms a "naturally extreme colonial climate into a pastoral topos" ("Women's Nature: Curiosity, Pastoral, and the New Science in British America" 219); while Parrish is referring to flora and fauna, this transformation can also be viewed as a social one wherein the climate moves from political fragmentation to harmonious intimacy. The sense that the poem is not only a proposal for but also an embodiment of retreat resides as well at the level of verb tense where Fergusson moves from future speculation in the first twelve lines -- "We may delighted rove" -- to the immediacy of the present in the final eight -- "Here sweet Simplicity presides."

While "The Invitation" is not the only poem in *Moore's Book* on retreat, here retreat from the world is both pleasurable and subtly critiqued through the poem's

placement amid other writings and a commonplace book that for the most part situate friendship alongside the responsibilities of life and community.<sup>56</sup> This critique continues first with the following transcription, Fergusson's "A Paraphrase on Agurs Prayer" (MMMB 90). Closely following a Biblical passage, Proverbs 30:7-9, the poetic paraphrase adds rhythm and rhyme, and slightly lengthens the original, but maintains the content and stanza breaks. Fergusson asks God to "Remove far from me, Vanity & Lies" and then pleads for neither riches nor poverty since in wealth she may be "forgetful" of God and in poverty may sin through stealing and cursing (*Moore's Book* 260). A passage chosen first by Fergusson for paraphrase and then rechosen by Moore, the poem and its theme of prayer suggest that pious contemplation is a more suitable activity during retreat than pastoral pleasure. Significantly, Fergusson's poem is about a specific type of prayer, augury, the Greek and Roman process by which authorized people determined whether a course of action had divine approval.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, instead of retreating for pleasure, one should retreat for contemplation *and* one should emerge from retreat with knowledge of how to act.

This argument for contemplation as a source for right action can also be found in Moore's Testimony Book. There, the opening text, "Mary Horner's Dream," concerns a fire "at the House of a Farmer" during a social gathering involving many people,

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<sup>56</sup> Fergusson's call for pastoral retirement accompanied by a friend also appears in Griffiths' "The voluntary Retreat 1772" (MMMB 44) and an untitled poem by Hetty Griffiths (MMMB 55), a niece of Hannah Griffiths. These poems, however, associate retreat with religious contemplation and the abandonment of worldly pleasures in favor of the joys of virtue and God's nature. The juxtaposition of the Hetty Griffiths' poem with the next entry, "New Jail. Philadelphia Jany. 1st. 1776" (MMMB 56) by an unidentified author, is interesting because both poems deal with removal from society, though the causes are different.

<sup>57</sup> See "Augury" in *The Concise Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* (*Oxford Reference Online*, 8 Sept. 2008 <<http://www.oxfordreference.com>>).



including acquaintances of Horner's who "live in high Life" and "dressed elegantly."<sup>58</sup>

Horner is the first to notice the fire and, as she warns the owner and others present in the house, and tries to save its valuable contents, she is repeatedly unable to get much response because people either do not care or do not notice. Even the objects she tries to save "change . . . [their] form" when she touches them. She finds some people asleep as the fire verges upon consuming them and some people who watch others fall through the floor and laugh because "they are gone plump into H[ell]." Late in the dream, she comes across a rooftop market that she knows will be destroyed along with the building. Rushing through the unheeding market crowd and their busy transactions, she leaps off the roof to safety and finds herself on a tree-lined path near her brother. The two discuss whether they could have put out the fire themselves if they had tried when they first noticed it. She wakes because "my Heart still ached for those I left behind."

The specific appeal of this vivid passage to Moore is uncertain since the transcription does not include an extended interpretation by Horner or by Moore.<sup>59</sup> In analyzing the dream, Carla Gerona reasons that "the narrative accords with other pro-reform dreams that suggested that Quakers were failing to maintain their ancient values" (165). In opening with this text, Moore may be joining Horner in her "pro-reform" stance. However, a component of the 1750s Society of Friends reform movement was a stricter position towards consanguineous marriages, a stance which resulted in the

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<sup>58</sup> See Ms. 975A, the Quaker Collection, Haverford College, Haverford.

<sup>59</sup> Horner does note that her own "Interpretation [is] sure" and "relat[es] in some Measure to some future Service which the great Landlord had for me to do." She also wrote a postscript in which she remembers that, while writing down the dream, "I had then the Idea of bartering away Things of *immense* Value for the sensual Gratification of a Feast; or in other Words, that the People were selling, like Esau, their Birth-right to heavenly Treasure for a Mess of Pottage."

Moore's disownment, instead of censure, when they married.<sup>60</sup> Therefore, it is more likely that some other aspect of the text appealed to Moore.

Components of the appeal might be revealed in a note Moore added near the title of "Mary Horner's Dream" and also in a consideration of the text's contents. Even though her title already contains a date, 1770, she highlights its temporal closeness to the American Revolution by writing, "This was a short Time before the Revolution in America commenc'd." Together the note and the date mark the entry as related to the Revolution, something the vision does not explore. The vision does dramatically explore the physical and emotional results of disengagement, both at the community and the individual levels. Because "it might have been easily done," Horner blames herself for not having put out the fire, thereby portraying inaction as wrong. As a result, it is possible to read the title, the note, and the content as implicitly arguing against withdrawal from Revolutionary politics.<sup>61</sup> The first entry's attitude towards secular engagement alters how one approaches the Testimony Book's many remaining entries and their content of Friendly testimony and piety. The poem's retreat into contemplation through pious words now appears preparatory for action. It suggests that a spiritual community should not be entirely insular, but should confront problems outside the community, even when its voice goes unheeded or is actively scorned.<sup>62</sup> If one applies

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<sup>60</sup> Censure, not disownment, was the disciplinary result for Moore's sister, Hannah Hill, and her cousin-husband, Samuel Preston Moore, who married in 1739, pre-reform.

<sup>61</sup> Perhaps a belief in women's moral force was another reason for Moore's selection of the Horner text as the first entry. As Gerona asserts in her analysis of the dream, "[L]ike other reformers, Horner believed that Quaker leadership and spiritual insight could come from unlikely sources -- perhaps even the poor. And she clearly blames the men in her dream for ignoring her warnings" (165).

<sup>62</sup> Another interesting female-authored entry which hints towards commentary on the Revolution is found in a letter from Elizabeth Webb to one of her sons: "It has appear'd to me very plain, that the Time is

this argument in favor of community engagement to analyzing Moore's transcription of Fergusson's "Agur's Prayer," one can read its call for retreat as a search for how to engage virtuously with the larger community.

Since it follows the two Fergusson poems, the next piece, Griffitts' June 1776 "The Review of past & present Times in Pennsylvania" (MMMB 91), seems to answer the implicit call for virtuous commentary made by the previous texts. The only prose entry of the final section, "The Review," with its appearance amid poems, invites extra attention and even resembles an imagined augur's pronouncement. Through "seventeenth-century incantatory prose, with its repetition and clusters of biblical imagery," as Blecki puts it (98), this piece suggests spiritual authority and tells the story of Pennsylvania's virtuous founding and recent rebellious fall. Griffitts begins with the period during which "the Almighty separated our Fathers from the Land of their Nativity, & gave the Possession of Strangers for their Inheritance" (*Moore's Book* 260). In connecting the Society's arrival in Pennsylvania with the receipt of a divine inheritance, Griffitts references the Old Testament book Joshua which describes Moses' successor's military campaigns to recover the Land of Canaan and which includes the apportionment of land to the tribes of Israel and their heirs. Unlike Joshua leading his followers in battle, Griffitts describes the colonization of Pennsylvania and the acquisition of

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coming in this Country, when the People will ge[t] into Parties one against another, & destroy one another, & they will be both very much in the wrong. - And it has likewise appeared to me there will be a People in that Time, that will not be a Party on either Side, & they will be preserv'd as in a Castle while the other are destroying one another." This text was written in 1728, but Moore transcribed it in 1777 or later. While this entry may appear to argue for the Society of Friends to stand aloof from the conflict, it also again demonstrates that destruction occurs when Friends do not engage. While it doesn't indicate that disaster would be averted if they did engage, the preceding entry, "The Substance of some Expressions drop'd by our beloved Fr.<sup>d</sup> Tho.<sup>s</sup> Gowthrope on his Departure from this City. Philadelphia 12<sup>th</sup> mo. 1777" again showcases the beliefs of a travelling Friend and this morally contrasts Webb's distance with Gawthrop's extensive engagement with the world.

"inheritances" as peaceful, almost an Edenic return: "the destroying Sword was sheathed in the Land of Quiet, & the Desolations of War were unknown to the Children of Peace; by the 'Bands of Love' they engaged the Natives, & the 'Laws of Kindness' were their only Weapons, they took the Strangers into the Communion of Brethren, & with--mutual Faith held the Covenant of Friendship" (*Moore's Book* 261). In addition to eliding the frequently shady processes of land acquisition, the difficulty in converting local Indians, and more recent hostilities amongst Pennsylvanians and indigenous peoples, this passage places faith and friendship at the foundation of the community. Friendship is the binding, affective relationship by which Pennsylvania Friends peacefully claimed, and thus authorized, their inheritance.

Griffitts returns frequently to the idea of inheritance throughout the remainder of her history. Transitioning subtly from a more intangible divine inheritance, she connects inheritance to the Pennsylvania charter. She criticizes "ye degenerate Sons" of her generation for "the Desolation you have brought upon yr. Fathers Inheritance" and insists "your Liberties are expiring, & the fair Plant of Freedom is withered in it Root,--You have removed it from its native Soil, you have relaxed the Bands of its Strength, & the Shelter of its Wing is known no more" (*Moore's Book* 261-2). These sons have disobeyed their covenant with God, "the Covenant of Friendship." Moreover, this passage suggests through repeated references to "Laws" and "Rule" that the Pennsylvania Charter is the physical embodiment of God's covenant. In declaring independence from that Charter, Pennsylvania has declared independence from God. Moreover, since Griffitts refers throughout this text to sons and fathers, she subtly places inheritances and

rebellion within a masculine sphere. As a result, her feminine voice appears separate from the conflict and appears to have additional insight through its distance.

In arranging this prose entry after the two poems by Fergusson, Moore not only reminds her reader of contemporary political concerns, but also implies that women are already somewhat separate from the conflict. The entries' collective message appears to be that retreat for women into the refuge and pleasure of feminine friendship, as Fergusson's "The Invitation" proposes, is not a proper option. Instead, women should use the authority of feminine friendship to contemplate, engage with, and remind their masculine counterparts of their duties to kith, kin, and God.<sup>63</sup> As guides experienced in pious friendship, such women can model for others how to live in a friendship community as an alternative to a politically divided society.

The friendship communities proposed through this last section of *Moore's Book* are not available to all. As I discussed previously, friendship generally, in both its religious and affective forms, provides for exclusions. While friendship exclusions have already been apparent in some of the analyzed poems -- Thomas Paine was certainly not Moore's friend -- one of the final poems in the last section, Griffiths' August 1776 "Peace" (MMMB 117), suggests that all who participated in the Revolution were unworthy of inclusion because their rebellion blackened their souls. The poem's hopeful message of healing and peace relies upon suggestions of racial difference to justify its limited

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<sup>63</sup> Women were encouraged to participate in politics during the colonial tea boycott that began in response to the Townshend Act of 1767. See Mary Beth Norton's *Liberty's Daughters: The Revolutionary Experience of American Women, 1750-1800* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1980), 157-63. Female Friends such as Griffiths, Moore, and Wright, appear to have sympathized with the tea boycott (perhaps because it was peaceful resistance). Several witty poems in *Moore's Book* focus on the topic of tea. See "The female Patriots" (MMMB 38) and "Wrote extempore on Tea" (MMMB 115). One even includes a response from Wright in the margin. See "The Ladies Lamentation over an empty Cannister" (MMMB 82).

audience.

As in other examples, the preceding poems prepare the audience for a sympathetic reading of this argument. The three previous texts are, listed from closest to furthest, another poem critical of Paine, Griffiths' April 1777 "On reading a few Paragraphs in the Crisis" (MMMB 116); Griffiths' short, witty ode "Wrote extempore on Tea" (MMMB 115); and Timothy Matlack's "Verses on C. Payton a Preacher among the People called Quakers" (MMMB 114), an elegy to the English traveling minister Catherine Payton Phillips.<sup>64</sup> In addition to their individual arguments, the poems prepare the reader for "Peace" by showcasing piety, demonstrating active engagement with contemporary concerns, and exposing unfriendly hypocrisy.

When she turns to the subject of "Peace," Griffiths somewhat rapturously meditates on the ability of love to inspire peace and vice versa. She opens by exclaiming, "Oh! for the gentle Voice of Peace to flow / With healing Virtue & cementing Power, / To charm a jarring World to rest" (*Moore's Book* 300). The appearance of this line implies that Griffiths herself desires to be that "gentle Voice of Peace." Unlike revolutionaries, she wishes to express "healing Virtue & cementing Power," a goal that suggests dependency upon the affiliative side of friendliness. Since Peace is one of the four Testimonies of Friends, her desire is individually superior because it signals that she

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<sup>64</sup> Paine published his third issue of *The American Crisis* in April 1777. In his headnote, Philip S. Foner's writes, "It was aimed primarily at the internal enemies of the Revolution (see Paine 73-101). Payton was a frequent subject for Friend authors and texts by and about her are found throughout *Moore's Book* and *Testimony Book*. See Larson, particularly 50-4, for a discussion of her place in the eighteenth-century transatlantic Friend community. The poem praising Payton (1726-1794) that is transcribed here was authored by Timothy Matlack, a member of the Free Quakers, an exiled group supporting the Revolution (see Marietta 246-8). By arranging this text so close to her critique of Paine's *Crisis*, she appears to be suggesting this type of writing is more worthy of authorship. She also, apparently, does not want Paine to emulate Matlack since her poem on the *Crisis* warns him, "Of female Manners never scribble" (*Moore's Book* 299).

is acting properly theologically and that these others are deeply wrong. Next, illustrating the power of friendship to soothe a restive world, she returns to the reciprocity of feeling described in "An Essay on Friendship":

Passions, the Elements of Life would flow  
In sweet Accordance to th' attemper'd Mind,  
Of heav'nly Harmony, & mutual Love,  
The Bands of Amity & Peace conjoin'd  
In the soft Concord of a tender Union,  
High Heaven would joy at Nature's holy Triumph,  
And Man be found the guardian Friend of Man,  
To watch with Angels round his Brother's Tent,  
With equal kind Attention screen from Danger,  
The soft Companion of his Exile here[.] (*Moore's Book* 301)

In these lines, friendship appears to be a relationship that "Heaven" finds joyful. At the same time, Griffitts' use of words like "Man" and "Brother," even as they refer to the seemingly universal peace which the poem promotes, also subtly moves Griffitts outside of the specific friendship for which she advocates. She again acts as a pedagogue instructing others in proper friendship. Doing so facilitates a reading wherein the audience is also aware that friendship is not universal.

Though Griffitts excludes herself from this friendship by being friendship's instructor, additional moments exclude others by showcasing their unfriendliness. For example, she draws a distinction between those who follow the precepts of "Revenge and

Discord" and those who do not. In describing the former, she contends that they are exchanging God's leadership for an "infernal Train" which "feed[s] the Rage of War" among people who are part of "a Race / Form'd the high Offspring of the God of Peace" (*Moore's Book* 300). In denying God's design of their natures, these people "ruin" their "Natures" and become "B[ou]nd" to the "dark Domains of hellish Hate" (*Moore's Book* 300). In contrast, the followers of love and peace are "the kindred Race" "link[ed] in the Laws of Love" (*Moore's Book* 300). They become "As Bretheren dear, as generous Friendship kind" (*Moore's Book* 300). Here, proponents of revolution actively resign piety and therefore resign their chance to participate in friendship. It seems as if peace can only be obtained by excluding impious rebels.

While this response mirrors the contemporaneous development of more clearly defined sides and the increasing inability of colonists to maintain moderate stances, the references to "race" in the above lines also remind us as readers that the community defined in *Moore's Book* has always been restricted. In using a circulated, literary text to author community, Moore and her real and textual circles seem to limit inclusion to literate elites and to exclude those they would be unlikely to socialize with such as non-Friends and persons of color.

The exclusionary nature of community and its connection to race is more apparent when one considers certain absences in *Moore's Book*. The only mention of the issue of slave manumission among Friends is a January 18, 1773 letter, "A Letter from P[atrick] H[enry] to R[obert] P[leasants]" (MMMB 51). Dated 1776, before the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting finally became strict in its discipline of slaveholding Friends, and written



by a slaveholding Virginian, the letter suggests that Friends can teach non-Friends about the evils of slavery and, by extension, tyranny even as its treatment of the subject remains temporally and geographically remote from the Revolution. While Moore herself may have supported the Friends' abolitionist stance, the above lines from "Peace" align practitioners of rebellion and violence with "dark Domains" and exclude them from God's race. If her readers are not for peace, they renounce their membership in God's "Race" and enter blackness. Therefore, in the moment where *Moore's Book* most actively proclaims peace and love, her chosen text takes some of its power from the racial exclusions already in place throughout society.

Amidst the other local and organizational arguments that *Moore's Book* makes, it first defines friendship and then applies its tenets to political commentary. The first section, composed mainly of poetry by Susanna Wright, proposes that true friendship is pious and, by extension, reciprocal, demanding, and temporal. In later sections, especially the final one which includes many poems composed during the American Revolution, these characteristics of friendship guides the book's response to politics. By reading entries for their juxtaposition, one can see that revolutionaries are unfriendly and that the friendly authors selected by Moore must instruct others in the right forms of social intimacy. Using the principles of pious friendship, the book responds to society's political divisions by proposing instead a friendship community that mirrors those principles and uses those principles to determine who may belong. Ultimately, *Moore's Book* constitutes a community that is circumscribed but engaged with others, steeped in feminine authority yet heterosocial, spiritually pious and contemplative yet active in

earthly concerns, seeking of stability yet temporary. In presenting these contradictions through the compilation of a commonplace book, Moore perhaps seeks to offset the violence and instability of the larger community and to produce a community that can balance these competing drives. Therefore, whereas Shields identifies an irresolvable contradiction between Christianity and belletristic discourse, Moore merges her religious belief with her command of a polite genre to intervene in political crisis.

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In the case of *Milcah Martha Moore's Book*, the rules for proper intimacy arise from understandings of piety. Intimacy grounded in piety is understood as a model for political life, an alternative to the political fragmentation and individual and communal isolation engendered by the Revolution. The book argues for a semi-public community united by a shared belief in how to behave in public political life, and political philosophy is less important than how friendly members of the community relate to each other. In fact, friendship is so important that those who are unfriendly are barred from participation. Thus, through the language of personal intimacy, *Moore's Book* sets the terms for communal relationships, membership, and priorities.

## EPILOGUE

What is intimacy? Intimacy is a personal relationship with an identifiable other. People must know each other in order to be intimates; otherwise intimacy is approximated. Proximity usually precedes intimacy, though it is no guarantee. Picture yourself on an airplane, rubbing shoulders with a stranger. In many instances, this anonymous person becomes someone you know, someone you relate to and have feelings about, albeit briefly, even if you never exchange a word. Perhaps you like this stranger because they happen to be reading a book you also enjoyed. Perhaps you find this stranger annoying because they refuse to share the armrest or repeatedly get up to use the bathroom. Now picture abrupt turbulence or a screaming infant in the row behind yours. These experiences may cause you and the stranger to share a grimace during the turbulence or a sigh of relief when the baby (finally) falls asleep. Such events may inspire conversation, the identification of common interests and background, and even the exchange of contact information. Thus proximity leads to intimacy. The same holds true in a variety of venues: college roommates become lifelong friends and office romances occur so frequently that they are a staple of the workplace sitcom.

In early America, intimacy often would have arisen through proximity as well, and it was a world in which there were many strange intimacies. Slaves and masters

shared households. Native and Anglo-Americans traded with each other. New settlements caused people from disparate classes to depend upon each other for their daily survival. Familiar forms of intimacy also existed, such as those between parents and children, co-parishioners, and friends. In many of these instances, proximity was not chosen and the emergence of intimacy included violence and conflict as well as harmony and shared affect.

These dynamics of intimacy may seem intuitive, but they have rarely been captured in scholarly theories about intimacy and communities. Instead, the focus has been upon approximate intimacies, the ways that imagining shared emotions, desires, beliefs, and experiences with some roughly definable but likely unnamable other causes people to feel as if they have a personal relationship with that other when in actuality they do not. While such work has certainly been productive and assisted us in articulating how nations emerge, countercultures resist, societies manage trauma, and consumer groups form, the result has been little discussion about the forms and uses of quotidian intimacies.

Within early American studies, the issue has been particularly problematic, likely due to the sway public sphere scholarship has held for the last several decades. As scholars work towards understanding why the United States and, by extension, the modern democracy arose, the focus has centered increasingly upon intimacy as a way to understand the anonymous yet powerful relationship between citizens. Fraternity, for example, is rarely discussed in terms of an actual relationship between brothers and instead typically refers to the ways that early American male citizens may have

understood themselves in relationship to each other. Consequently, even analyses of imagined fraternity do not take into account their subjects' actual experiences of biological brotherhood.

While this blind spot in early American studies points to intriguing questions (how is Benjamin Franklin's relationship with his older brother replicated in our modern understanding of citizenship?), it has been particularly problematic for the analysis of women's intimacy. We already know that the founding fathers were not the founding mothers. Thus, eighteenth-century women's necessarily different experiences of intimacy have gone largely unremarked in considerations of public life. They appear to have little bearing upon our understandings of early America except to those who already value the domestic or wish to recuperate women's experiences. To be blunt, feminist scholarship amongst early Americanists (at least amongst those who study literature) is mostly a subfield to which the field as a whole pays lip service. For me, this segregation of feminist scholarship is why Cathy N. Davidson's *Revolution and the Word* and Linda K. Kerber's *Women of the Republic* continue to be *the* early American feminist monographs (as if they had already said everything there was to say) decades after their publications, despite the many ways more recent studies of women's reading and writing have refined and even rejected many of the books' premises.

I believe attentiveness to women's experiences of intimacy can shift our approach to community in early America. First, it helps us identify how women could and did participate in and mold public life. While most would acknowledge that women writers existed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and that they did impact their

communities, the mechanisms of their influence have rarely been examined. Instead, women authors are approached as exceptional or as circulating their texts in the same ways and to the same purposes as male authors. Second, the study of women's intimacy assists us in mapping communities between the domestic and the national. In considerations of white men's experiences and authorship, as in the fraternity example, the approximate intimacy of democracy empowers these men as a class, as citizen-brothers of the United States. Conversely, if a woman feels emotionally equal to male citizens, that shared affect does not translate into power. For many women authors, therefore, the purpose of creating and extending intimate attachments through their texts is not to graft themselves onto an expansive and anonymous citizenship, but to imagine much more local and bounded communities, ones which extend rather than erase their influence. Through textual neighborhoods, women can replicate their quotidian experiences of intimacy, retain their empowered positions, and avoid much of the ridicule and denigration that a speaking woman could incur when entering public life.

This continued marginalization of women's writing is reflected in the scholarship that has been done about women's intimacy. For example, in *Perfecting Friendship*, Ivy Schweitzer extols friendship as a vehicle through which women could craft egalitarian attachments and thus claim a certain measure of political power. While she does not claim that women's friendship can be subsumed within friendship as a whole (in fact she is quite clear that women's and men's friendship are distinct and mutually constitutive), she implies that friendship is the ideal relationship since it is the one via which women can most approximate citizenship. Yet, especially in the absence of the right to vote or

hold political office, to be like a citizen or even worthy of citizenship is not the same as having full citizenship, just as approximate intimacy is not the same as a personal relationship with an identifiable individual. Schweitzer convincingly argues for how using friendship as an institution assisted with the long-term process of women's political enfranchisement, yet it does not articulate how women acted upon their more immediate needs to intervene in their local communities.

The goal of *Imagined Intimacies* is to capture the forms and uses of women's experiences of quotidian intimacy. In doing so, I would like to bridge the gap between the subfield of feminist studies and the rest of the early American literary studies by insisting that oftentimes women authors do not circulate texts in the same ways or to the same ends as their male counterparts but that they materially altered early American public life. We cannot truly understand the period and its literature without discussing the distinctive and extensive ways that a significant portion of the population affected it. The study of women's writing is not simply a way to enfold their texts into the early American canon. Just as Schweitzer sees the study of women's and men's friendship as complementary, each providing insight into the other, so is an understanding of men's and women's intimacy necessary to a comprehensive view of community in early America.

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In reflecting upon what intimacy is, the problems I see in early American scholarship, and how I would like this project to ameliorate those issues, I am also struck by the ways I have adhered unquestioningly to some of its assumptions and therefore left

certain points unsaid.

In the first place, if intimacy typically arises from proximity, then intimacy is not about harmony. People in proximity rarely remain in constant harmony. Instead, intimacy entails conflict in the form of disagreement, resentment, repressed desire, disgust, annoyance, pity, ridicule, envy, boredom, etc. Yet in responding to a scholarly conversation that has emphasized the ways that intimacy produced equality and synchronized disparate people into a nation, I too have emphasized the harmoniousness of intimacy, not its internal tensions. That is not to say conflict does not exist within *Imagined Intimacies*, but in retrospect I can see that the negotiation of conflict was integral to many of the communities I describe. Conflict was not merely something that needed to be resolved. Osborn's and Lucas Pinckney's textual erasures of enslaved persons are violent acts, as are Moore's disownment of unfriendly revolutionaries, Coosaponakeesa's threats of war, and even Wheatley's call to her fellow slaves to claim their deaths. Perhaps conflict energizes these intimacies and their creators. Perhaps these women's communal creations are fundamentally acts of violence, as these authors force others into proximity, intimacy, and even uneasy harmony with themselves.

In retrospect, I also realize that *neighborhood* is a more accurate term for the kinds of communities I describe than *semi-public community*. The term neighborhood better points to the inbetweenness I noted above because a neighborhood is bigger than a private home but necessarily more bounded, more local, than a nation. A neighborhood intuitively suggests intimacy, not approximate intimacy. *Neighborhood* also points to another aspect of this dissertation that has been implied, but rarely expressed directly, and



that is the importance of texts as material objects to the various chapters. One could say that what I do resembles book history in that I approach texts as material objects acting as physical connections between the authors and the objects of their desired intimacies. In almost every instance, the texts I examine *were* circulated among the others that these women sought to enfold into their imagined textual neighborhoods. And even in the case of Sarah Osborn, who likely did not share her spiritual diary with Phillis or any of the other black Christians she led, the meetings in her home invariably involved Osborn selecting texts and reading them aloud to the assembled group. Thus texts bridge gaps between people and facilitate the emergence of intimacy, but in a way that differs from the print circulation and approximate intimacy depended upon and theorized by scholars of the public sphere.

The difference lies in the distinctiveness of the author. The textual neighborhoods I describe in these chapters depend upon their authors. Their readers know them as individuals, whether or not the readers have ever met them, and when they encounter the texts, they are encountering a physical object that replicates the physical proximity that often precedes intimacy. Admittedly, especially in the case of published texts, the readers lose this connection to the author, but those are not the readers in which I am interested.

The dependence upon the author is why I believe textual neighborhoods are so predominant in women's writing; the neighborhoods depend upon their continued presence. The women are *not* catalysts; they are the core substances, integral to the process. Thus this kind of intimacy is a pragmatic choice. It depends upon a readily

available rhetoric -- that language of their quotidian intimacies -- and can be adapted to shifts in the authors' interests, as in the case of Coosaponakeesa's dismantling of Creek-Georgia friendship in her memorials.

In conclusion, I hope this dissertation has revealed the inner workings of these women's textual neighborhoods and assisted in the ongoing process of bringing feminism into the mainstream of early American literary studies. The understandings of literature made through the examination of white male authors cannot be haphazardly applied to women's writing, just as they cannot be so applied to the works of racial others.

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