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"Blessed are the Dead Which Die in the Lord": The Influence of the American Tract Society on the Historical Evolution of American Literary Sentimentalism

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“BLESSED ARE THE DEAD WHICH DIE IN THE LORD”:

**THE INFLUENCE OF THE AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY ON THE HISTORICAL
EVOLUTION OF AMERICAN LITERARY SENTIMENTALISM**

by

Joel Bridges Henderson

**Abstract of a Dissertation
Submitted to the Graduate Studies Office
of The University of Southern Mississippi
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

May 2009

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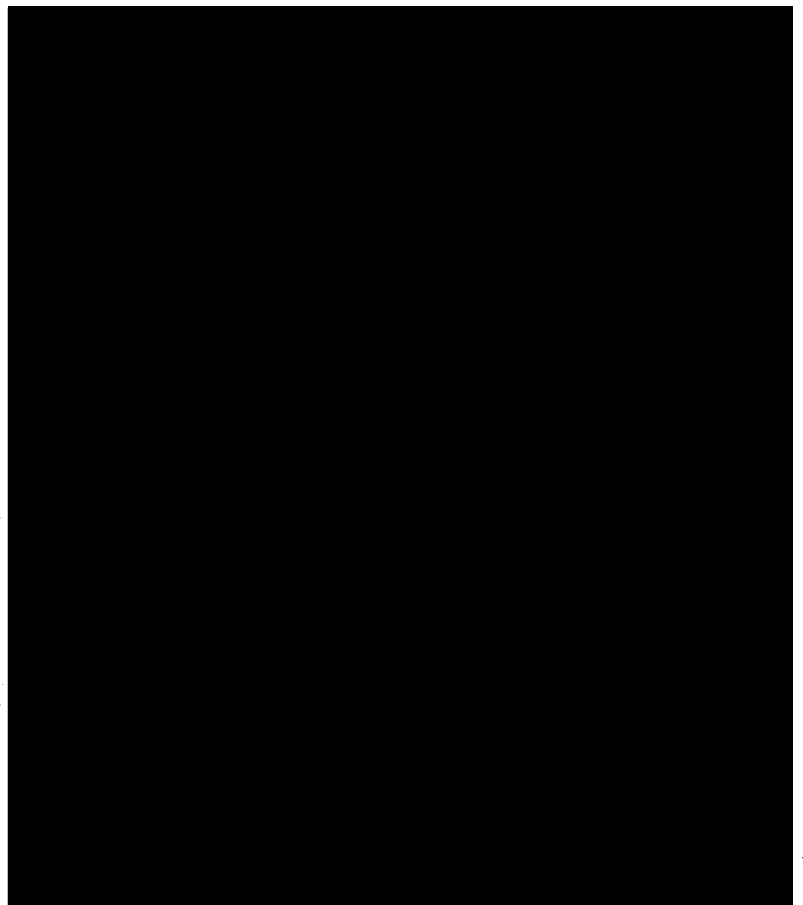
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ABSTRACT

“BLESSED ARE THE DEAD WHICH DIE IN THE LORD”:

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by Joel Bridges Henderson

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Studies of American literary sentimentalism usually focus on either the genre's origins in the novels of the early republic or its zenith as represented by the mid-nineteenth-century bestsellers. Such a focus reveals two distinctly different versions of sentimentalism. While the novels of Susanna Rowson, Hannah Foster, and William Brown evidence a genre influenced by Calvinism, the bestsellers of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Maria Cummins, and Susan Warner represent a sentimentalism inextricably fused with nineteenth-century evangelicalism. The evolution of the genre is more clearly explained by the intervention of the American Tract Society (ATS). In its ongoing efforts to convert the nation to Christianity, the ATS adopted sentimentalism, particularly the genre's most conventional trope: the deathbed scene. Adapting this trope to its evangelical sensibilities, the ATS framed heaven as a “home” and death as a “homecoming.” Furthermore, the Society replaced the isolated fallen women of the early novels with the *puer senex*, the wise child who joyously anticipates death and who forms the center of a community of loved ones. With the addition of an exhortation, hymns, and scriptural language, the deathbed scene created by the ATS heavily influenced these same scenes in the mid-century bestsellers. This study undertakes a comparison of the death scenes in the early republican novels, the early-nineteenth-century ATS tracts, and

the mid-nineteenth-century bestsellers. Such an analysis reveals the ways in which the Society crafted not only a genre with mass appeal but also a community of readers in which both nineteenth-century and twentieth-century sentimental bestsellers could flourish.

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INTRODUCTION

American sentimentalism is usually understood to have emerged in 1789 with the publication of William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy*, and the genre in its various forms represents one of the most persistent traditions in American literature. From its early manifestation in the novels of Brown and such other practitioners as Susanna Rowson and Hannah Webster Foster, to the bestsellers of the 1850s by Harriet Beecher Stowe, Maria Cummins, and Susan Warner, and even to current mass market chart toppers by Nicolas Sparks, Jan Karon, and Mitch Albom, sentimentalism is a thread inextricably woven into the tapestry of American literature. Though the genre has been much studied (and also much maligned), the possibilities for critical investigation are far from exhausted. In this dissertation, I explore the work of the American Tract Society (hereafter "ATS" or "the Society"), a publishing organization partly responsible for the widespread success enjoyed by sentimentalism in the mid-nineteenth century. My exploration of the American Tract Society's history, mission, publications, and influence reveals the formative role the Society played not only in American culture but also in the historical development of American sentimentalism. I will illustrate how the Society's powerful blending of the evangelical and the sentimental helped shape the evolution of one of America's most enduring genres.

Brief Overview of Sentimentalism

Though frequent topics for critical analysis, "sentimentalism" and its related terms ("sentiment," "sensibility," "sentimentality") remain difficult concepts to define. R.F. Brissenden refers to "sentimentalism" as an "unusually complex and slippery" term (12). Nina Baym also categorizes attempts to define sentimentalism as "slippery," since

identification of a work as sentimental lies often “in the eye of the beholder” (“Women’s Novels” 337). Nevertheless, such scholars as June Howard, Jerome McGann, and Janet Todd have continued trying to define the terms clearly in recent years.¹ Despite their work, a bewildering array of definitions exists, in which the different terms overlap one another and are distinguishable in only very subtle ways. For example, *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines “sensibility” as an “emotional consciousness; glad or sorrowful, grateful or resentful recognition of a person’s conduct, or of a fact or a condition of things” (def. 4a). “Sentiment” is defined as a “sensation, physical feeling. In later use, a knowledge due to vague sensation” (def. 2). Alternately, the *OED* defines “sentiment” as a “refined and tender emotion; exercise or manifestation of ‘sensibility’” (def. 9a). The entry concludes with “now chiefly in derisive use, conveying an imputation of either insincerity or mawkishness.” “Sentimental” is defined by the *OED* as “Of persons, their dispositions and actions: Characterized by sentiment. Originally in favourable sense: Characterized by or exhibiting refined and elevated feeling. In later use: Addicted to indulgence in superficial emotion; apt to be swayed by sentiment” (def. 1). Though all of the terms share common references to emotions or feelings, the different words are not entirely interchangeable.

With such a wide variety of interpretations, it is little wonder that scholars occasionally share Lady Bradshaigh’s oft-quoted confusion in her 1749 letter to Samuel Richardson:

¹See June Howard’s “What is Sentimentality?” (1999), Jerome McGann’s *Poetics of Sensibility* (1998), Janet Todd’s *Sensibility* (1986), and the literary dictionaries of Karl Beckson and Arthur Ganz (1989), M.H. Abrams (2005), and William Harmon and Hugh Holman (2003). Other scholars attempt definition through identifying characteristics: Maureen Harkin (*The Man of Feeling*, 2005), Mary Lenard (*Preaching Pity*, 1999), and Robyn Warhol (*Having a Good Cry*, 2003).

What, in your opinion is the meaning of the word *sentimental*, so much in vogue among the polite? Every thing clever and agreeable is comprehended in that word . . . I am frequently astonished to hear such a one is a *sentimental* man; we were a *sentimental* party; I have been taking a *sentimental* walk. ("Sentimental," def. 1)

Despite this confusion, sentimentalism remains an "I know it when I see it" sort of feature, for which the generally agreed-upon central traits include scenes of distress, visible expressions of sympathy, the insertion of didactic or moralistic lessons, and the privileging of emotion in response to situations and surroundings. These characteristics are employed by sentimental authors in appeals to the reader's emotions, and all of these characteristics are evident in the novels of the early republic, the ATS tracts, and the bestsellers of the mid-nineteenth century.

In addition to an attempted identification of the genre's characteristics, it is useful to summarize the historical evolution of sentimentalism, beginning with its eighteenth-century British antecedents, in order to provide a context for the American variant. The British antecedents trace their roots to the seventeenth-century sensationalist philosophy of John Locke.² Locke argued that moral values emerge from human sensations of pleasure or pain, not from innate definitions of good and evil. His influence continued in the work of Moral Sense School philosophers such as David Hume and Adam Smith, both of whom attempted to link morality and emotion.³ They associated moral sense with the imagination, which allows the individual to understand the impact of his or her actions on others and shapes ethical responses. Ultimately, moral sense philosophy

² For further information on the influence on sentimentalism of Locke and his students, consult Michael Bell's *Sentimentalism, Ethics, and the Culture of Feeling* (2000), Todd's *Sensibility* (1986), and Kristin Boudreau's *Sympathy in American Literature* (2002).

³ See Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-1740) and Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759).

became associated with Jean Jacques Rousseau, who glorified the natural sentiments and opposed the corruption of society.⁴ Rousseau believed that man was innocent in his natural state but that he was corrupted by civilization. The philosopher's connection with both sentimentalism and the French Revolution (1789-1799) made the genre "suspect" (Harkin 20) and also made it easy for critics to scapegoat moral sense philosophy and sentimentality, leading to its eventual decline in popularity in England. Bruce Burgett argues that the French Revolution was perceived to be "driven by sentiment" (6) and that the literary culture of the time relied on readers' "emotional responses to produce political effects" (*Sentimental Bodies* 3). Some contemporary critics were quick to blame sentiment for the anarchy and revolution in France; nevertheless, from these early eighteenth-century philosophical underpinnings, a literary and social movement developed.

The Cult of Sensibility was "the cultural movement devoted to tear-demanding exhibitions of pathos and unqualified virtue" (Todd 8). The Cult was originally an eighteenth-century concept, but it continued to flourish in the nineteenth century as well.⁵ Despite its different generic expressions (including poetry and drama), the Cult was defined by fiction from the 1740s through the 1770s. These fictions focused on affectional relationships between spouses, lovers, siblings, and parents and children. The novel of sensibility is best represented by the works of Samuel Richardson, whose epistolary *Pamela* (1740) established the pattern used in later novels by William Hill

⁴ For further information on Rousseau's influence, see Robert Solomon's *In Defense of Sentimentality* (2004) and Harkin's *The Man of Feeling* (2005). For a more comprehensive look at the development of sentimentalism in France, see Margaret Cohen's *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (1999), which traces the evolution of the modern French novel.

⁵ Michael Bell argues convincingly for the continued influence of the Cult of Sensibility on today's positive culture of feeling.

Brown and Hannah Webster Foster. Both *Pamela* and Richardson's *Clarissa* address the typical concerns: sensibility's ethical aspects and its connections to benevolence. The former relates the tale of a poor servant girl, whose virtuous behavior is rewarded with marriage and fortune, allowing her to reform those around her by promoting piety and harmony; the latter focuses on a young woman whose rejection of an arranged marriage leads to isolation from her family, rape, and eventually her demise. *Clarissa's* virtue, however, remains unassailable throughout her life, rendering her Richardson's "absolute example of the virtuous woman" (Todd 69). Richardson's work also initially established the gendering of sentiment as female; but by the mid-1700s, both the *Woman of Feeling* and the *Man of Feeling* had come into literary vogue.⁶ Representative of the latter is Henry Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling* (1771), in which a sensitive male encounters a callous world. Though the British sentimental novel was subject to parody, as in Henry Fielding's *Shamela* (1741), it continued to exert an influence on English fiction, evidenced by Dickens's famous depiction of Little Nell's death in *Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), with its portrayal of the angelic dying child and the copious tears that it promotes in all those who attend her bedside.

It is out of this historical context that the American variant of sentimentalism emerged in fiction near the end of the eighteenth century. William Hill Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789) represents one of the earliest expressions of American sentimentalism. According to Cathy Davidson and others, Brown's text also represents the first novel in America (*Revolution* 83). *The Power of Sympathy* was followed shortly

⁶ Two works to consult for further information on the *Woman of Feeling* and the *Man of Feeling* are Ann Cvetkovich's *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism* (1992), a study of the suffering woman in Victorian fiction, and Eve Sedgwick's *Epistemology of the Closet* (1990), which examines the suffering, sentimental male body through the lens of queer theory.

by Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1791) and Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797); the novels' publication firmly established the sentimental tradition in America.

Though both much of the existing scholarship and my exploration of the genre's antecedents focus on specific sentimental novels by Brown, Rowson, and Foster, that focus in no way delimits literary sentimentalism in eighteenth-century America. The sentimental strain is discernable not only in the novels of the early republic, but also in the poetry and drama of the day. Much of this late eighteenth-century literature reflects a nationalistic bent. The poetry of Timothy Dwight, Joel Barlow, and Philip Freneau captures the *zeitgeist* of the post-Revolutionary period with its sentimental musings on the nation's character, landscape, and future glory. This same nationalistic tendency is reflected in the drama of Royal Tyler, particularly in *The Contrast*. Nor was the fiction of the early republic limited to the sentimental novel. Instead, the post-Revolutionary period witnessed the growth of multiple genres (the captivity narrative, the picaresque, the gothic, and the frontier romance among others⁷), most of which imitate English antecedents and all of which incorporate, to varying degrees, elements of sentimentalism. However, the sentimental novels discussed in this project more clearly resemble Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* and *Clarissa*, the former published by Benjamin Franklin in America in 1744.

⁷ The captivity narrative genre includes the narratives of Abraham Panther (1787) and Bunker Gay (1792). Hugh Henry Brackenridge's *Modern Chivalry* (1792) and Tabitha Tenney's *Female Quixotism* (1801) are representative of the picaresque and are largely satirical. Charles Brockden Brown's *Wieland; or, the Transformation* (1798) is an example of the early American gothic. Interestingly, just after the turn of the century, Brown's efforts resulted in *Clara Howard* (1801) and *Jane Talbot* (1801), both of which are sentimental novels of the epistolary tradition. For further information on the genre, see Teresa Goddu's *Gothic America* (1997). Later examples of the frontier romance that have received much critical notice include Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok* (1824) and Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie* (1827).

Despite the continued development of sentimentalism throughout the early nineteenth century, the genre's popularity was not fully realized until the publication of the mid-nineteenth-century bestsellers: *The Wide Wide World* (1850), *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852), and *The Lamplighter* (1854). By dint of its focus, most current literary scholarship seems to concur that these bestsellers represent the next noteworthy development in the history of American sentimentalism. However, that scholarship has been remarkably varied in its estimation and analysis of the genre.

Critical Responses to Sentimentalism

The critical estimation of American sentimentalism seemed to have reached its nadir with the New Critics in the first half of the twentieth century. Because of the genre's mismatch with their formalist approach, scholars like Herbert Ross Brown, F.O. Matthiessen, and Fred Pattee decried the works' alleged lack of artistic merit. This dismissal led to a dearth of critical attention throughout the mid-twentieth century. Not until the 1970s, at the height of the feminist movement, did the critical gaze return to sentimentalism in any significant way, as scholars attempted to admit previously excluded female authors to the canon.

In 1977, Ann Douglas's *The Feminization of American Culture* revived interest in these nearly forgotten texts and authors. Her text explores the social function of sentimentalism in Victorian America, focusing on the alliance between middle-class women and liberal clergyman of the period. Douglas contends that this alliance effectively "feminized" culture. This feminization occurred through the alliance's attempted use of the press to gain a voice in a patriarchal socio-political system that marginalized them. For Douglas, this feminization privileged sentiment over reason and

theology. She further argues that the alliance was complicit in the creation of separate spheres by effectively sanctioning the world of business as masculine. Unfortunately, though arguing for the historical importance of sentimentalism, Douglas ultimately condemns the genre as having a profoundly negative impact on American culture, a judgment that even more firmly indicts the texts than did the New Critics, since it charges sentimentalism with a destructive influence rather than simply with irrelevance.

Following closely on the heels of Douglas's text was Nina Baym's *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820-1870* (1978). Baym's examination of the "overplot" in a wide range of "popular" novels argues that female authors of the nineteenth century attempted to expand their sphere of influence by working within the confines of their socially-proscribed spheres. Though more forgiving than Douglas's text, Baym's work eschews any claims of literary greatness for the novels she explores, focusing instead on the story that unites them, the quest for self-sufficiency.

Building on Baym's claims of agency by nineteenth-century female authors, Jane Tompkins's *Sensational Designs* (1985) stresses the importance of historicizing the genre in order to understand, as her subtitle suggests, "the cultural work of American fiction." In a work that also examines novels by Charles Brockden Brown and James Fenimore Cooper, Tompkins interprets sentimentalism as an attempt to redefine the social order, and she urges the re-evaluation of nineteenth-century sentimental texts using historically appropriate criteria, including the works' cultural intentions. Tompkins argues that female authors were engaged in a subtle subversion of the patriarchy from their confinement in the separate sphere of the home. These authors, Tompkins contends, believed in their power to transform the world from their station at the hearth.

Tompkins's work reenergized the critical dialogue about the genre; and since 1985, a steady stream of critical texts has offered a variety of interpretive strategies for dealing with these nineteenth-century authors.

The two groundbreaking works by Douglas and Tompkins reveal antithetical assessments of sentimentalism. Douglas argues that sentimentalism represents complicity with the prevailing ideology and Tompkins that it represents subversion. This opposition continues to shape the criticism. As June Howard notes, most scholarship continues to "relapse with some regularity into the terms of the Douglas-Tompkins debate . . . [since] . . . essays still argue the question of whether the form is complicit with or subversive of dominant ideology" (64). Her review of fifteen years of criticism substantiates her point convincingly. Further, an examination of the years' work since Howard's article reveals more of the same kind of criticism as described below. The issues raised by Ann Douglas and Jane Tompkins remain a touchstone for most scholarly examinations of American sentimentalism, not only in terms of ideology but also in terms of critical binarism. Many scholars continue to interpret sentimentalism through an either/or approach, and most of what has been written in the last ten years continues to build on issues raised in the scholarship prior to Howard's article.

Contributors to the Douglas-Tompkins debate include such contemporaries as Philip Fisher (*Hard Facts*, 1985) and Nancy Armstrong (*Desire and Domestic Fiction*, 1987). Both, like Tompkins, focus on the transformative power of fiction. Fisher examines the cultural work of identification managed by the nineteenth-century American novel, while Armstrong explores the connections between the domestic novel and middle-class empowerment in nineteenth- and twentieth-century British fiction. In

the 1990s, a spate of critical texts continued this examination of the cultural and political work of American fiction, and twenty-first century scholarship has shown no decline in interest in these same issues.⁸ Other aspects have garnered much critical interest, too, including the power disparity between public lives and private lives,⁹ the genre's relationship to the marketplace,¹⁰ and the formation of community or individual identity.¹¹

Though these critical issues all provide viable points of access for an examination of American literary sentimentalism, these issues, like the issues of race, class, and sexuality, prove less useful for this project's argument concerning the ATS. Instead, my examination hinges on a critical paradigm that factors in the more absolute force of theology. The ATS's *contemptus mundi* approach reflects such biblical counsel as "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world" (1 John 2.15). Reflecting that approach, my project suggests that issues of class and race were of secondary importance to the Society's focus on theology.

⁸The 1990s produced Patricia Spacks's *Desire and Truth* (1990), Lynda Zwinger's *Daughters, Fathers, and the Novel* (1991), Shirley Samuels's *The Culture of Sentiment* (1992), Markman Ellis's *The Politics of Sensibility* (1996), Julia Stern's *The Plight of Feeling* (1997), and Burgett's *Sentimental Bodies* (1998). Continued interest is evidenced by the work of Amit Rai (*Rule of Sympathy*, 2002), Shelley Streeby (*American Sensations*, 2002), and Cindy Weinstein (*Family, Kinship, and Sympathy in Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, 2004).

⁹One work with such a focus is Cathy Davidson's and Jessamyn Hatcher's *No More Separate Spheres* (2002). This text attempts to undercut the prevailing paradigm of public as male and private as female and builds on the work done by 1998's special issue of *American Literature* with the same title and by Monika Elbert's *Separate Spheres No More* (2000). Glenn Hendler's *Public Sentiments* (2001) examines the public and private implications of sentimentalism while Francesca Sawaya (*Modern Women, Modern Work*, 2003) and Alison Piepmeier (*Out in Public*, 2004) examine female authors trying to negotiate the boundary between their domestic and professional lives.

¹⁰Critics continue to focus on the relationship between sentimentalism and the economy. Building on the work of Susan Coultrap-McQuin and others, Gillian Skinner's *Sensibility and Economics in the Novel* (1999) and Joseph Fichtelberg's *Critical Fictions* (2003) explore the role of sentimental novels in contemporary economic debates and market behaviors. Lori Merish (*Sentimental Materialism*, 2000) examines the "ethic of feminine consumption" and the sentimental identification of personal possessions.

¹¹Centering on the tension between communal and individual identities, seminal works by Gillian Brown (*Domestic Individualism*, 1990), Elizabeth Barnes (*States of Sympathy*, 1997), and Nina Baym ("Women's Novels and Women's Minds," 1998) have shaped the arguments of more recent works such as Mary Louise Kete's *Sentimental Collaboration* (2000) and Boudreau's *Sympathy in American Literature* (2002).

Besides the binary opposition early established by Douglas and Tompkins, critical attention tends to focus on two specific eras in American sentimentalism. Though the decades between 1800 and 1850 produced a quickly developing national literature, including novels with arguably sentimental overtones such as Lydia Maria Child's *Hobomok* (1824) and Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), scholarship on sentimentalism continues to focus on two important eras in the genre's development: its origins and its zenith.¹² Most critical studies examine novels in either the early republic (such works as *Charlotte Temple*, *The Coquette*, and *The Power of Sympathy*) or at the high point of nineteenth-century American sentimentalism in the 1850s. Both positions on this historical continuum are given much attention, but little scholarship is devoted to the intervening years, roughly the first half of the nineteenth century, leaving them largely unexplored. It is the formative period between these two eras that this dissertation attempts to illuminate. A comparison of the works of these two periods reveals, in fact, two different versions of sentimentalism; the sentimentalism of the mid-nineteenth century is radically different from the version produced just prior to 1800. An examination of this difference will reveal the role that the ATS and evangelicalism can be seen to have played in the evolution of American sentimentalism.

The early sentimental works function as secular cautionary tales reflecting not just moral concerns but national anxieties. The sentimental novels of the mid-nineteenth century, however, function as positive evangelical *exempla*, illustrating for their readers the value of a godly life. Interestingly, current critics tend to overlook or ignore the

¹² For further discussion of the sentimental aspects of Cooper's novel, see Diane Herndl's "Style and the Sentimental Gaze in *The Last of the Mohicans*" or Lora Romero's "Vanishing Americans: Gender, Empire, and New Historicism." For an exploration of the "sentimental imperialism" of *Hobomok*, read Bruce Burgett's "Heart of Civilization."

genre's clear connections to evangelicalism. As Mary Lenard notes, "For entirely different reasons, both traditional and feminist scholars have in large part rejected the traditional religious and social values that characterize the sentimentalism tradition" (11). I contend in this dissertation that to reject these values is to reject the key to understanding clearly the historical evolution of American sentimentalism. Only through an investigation of sentimentalism's evangelical ties does a complete picture of the genre appear. This project posits that one of the primary catalysts for this change was the American Tract Society, founded in 1814.

The ATS was born out of prevalent evangelical concerns over increasing immigration, expansion, and urbanization. As disparate evangelical groups coalesced into a united front during the Second Great Awakening (1800-1830s), the emotional zeal for mission work and postmillennial beliefs about the second coming of Jesus motivated the ATS to search out new ways to reach the unconverted working-class masses. The Society embraced technological advances like the steam-driven printing press, and it pioneered innovative distribution methods. Most importantly, the ATS adopted the most popular literary mode in the country, sentimentalism, in its efforts to gain wider acceptance and influence for its evangelical vision. The Society appropriated standard plot devices from the early novels of American sentimentalism, particularly the melodramatic deathbed scene, and then modified and endowed those scenes with evangelical significance.

In this dissertation, I intend to focus on the work of the ATS between 1814 and 1850 in an attempt to provide a more complete critical understanding of American sentimentalism at the mid-point of the nineteenth century. David Reynolds argues in

“The Feminization Controversy” that nineteenth-century American sentimentalism need not be considered an either-or proposition, since it combines positive elements of both Douglas’s “feminization” camp and Tompkins’s “feminist” camp (101). Like Reynolds, I hope to complicate the formulation of the Douglas-Tompkins binary, especially within the context of discrete male/female roles, by illustrating that the sentimental work of the ATS was promoted primarily by male evangelical entrepreneurs who envisioned a total subversion of the existing order through the second coming of Christ. Finally, I intend to address the aforementioned gap in critical scholarship by examining the ATS publications before 1850, thus “filling in the blanks” between sentimentalism’s American origins and its zenith and establishing a continuous history that explains how the genre’s later variants emerge from its earlier forms.

Studies of the ATS

Although several doctoral projects and articles have chosen the ATS as the subject of study, none of these examine, in an extended fashion, the actual texts themselves. Moreover, no book-length studies and very few dissertations have taken the Society as their primary subject. Those that have are studies of American religious history and thus include no discussion of the connection between the Society and American sentimentalism. These dissertations include Helen Leavitt’s “The American Tract Society, 1825-1850” (1936), Harvey Neufeldt’s “The ATS, 1825-1865: An Examination of its Religious, Economic, Social, and Political Ideas” (1971), Stephen Slocum, Jr.’s “The American Tract Society: 1825-1975. An Evangelical Effort to Influence the Religious and Moral Life of the United States” (1975), and Karl Valois’s

“To Revolutionize the World: The American Tract Society and the Regeneration of the Republic, 1825-1877” (1994).

Leavitt’s study offers an historical account of the first twenty-five years of the Society’s existence, and its brevity and narrowness of scope preclude an examination of the organization’s literary endeavors. Slocum, one-time General Director of the ATS, studies the publishing history of the Society and the roller coaster that the Society has ridden in terms of publishing successes and failures. Slocum’s effort examines the first 150 years of the organization, but, like the other dissertations, his study focuses solely on extra-literary aspects of the Society, particularly its organizational issues and quantifiable accomplishments.

Through an examination of the Society’s leaders and leading supporters, Neufeldt’s dissertation focuses on how the ATS adapted and responded ideologically to changes in Jacksonian America. Neufeldt claims that the ATS believed a drastic reordering of society was unnecessary; reform could take place through individual moral regeneration. He argues that this philosophy had severe limitations for blue-collar America and was a complete failure for slaves.

Valois’ dissertation argues many of the same points. Valois criticizes the Society’s notion of itself as a great engine of social change. The author rebuts this assumption with an examination of the society’s response to the problems of slavery and race. Like Neufeldt, Valois claims that the Society’s individualistic approach to social reform was far too weak to accomplish anything of lasting significance. His dissertation focuses on the birth and history of the Society and then looks closely at the religious views and struggles of the Society with regard to slavery.

In each of these studies, a significant contribution is made to documenting the Society's history and activities; however, only brief mention is made of individual publications. Consequently, it does not seem surprising that despite the continuous critical interest that sentimentalism has received in recent years and the pervasiveness and volume of sentimental publications produced by the ATS, remarkably little has been written linking the two. In fact, it would appear that only three authors have thought to take critical notice of the connection in any substantial way.

E.K. Maxfield, Theodore Hovet, and Jane Tompkins have explored the relationship between sentimentalism and the ATS, with widely divergent results. In 1929, E.K. Maxfield published "'Goody Goody' Literature and Mrs. Stowe," a purported study of the influences on Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Ostensibly, the article attempts to examine religious tracts, including multiple examples from the ATS, as sentimental source material for the character of Little Eva. As a source study, however, Maxfield's work represents an obvious example of *parti pris*, and the author's sarcasm and obvious contempt for the publications and traditions he discusses leave little room for any sort of critical argument. The author's constant references to the tracts as "rubbish" and "mucilaginous sentiment" and to religious zeal as "pious jazz" reflect an authorial prejudice far more interested in dismissing these sources than in serious critical inquiry.

Published fifty years later in 1979, Theodore Hovet's "Mrs. Thomas C. Upham's 'Happy Phebe': A Feminine Source of Uncle Tom" offers a second, more scholarly, source study of Stowe's novel. Hovet references Stowe's discussion of a "small religious tract" that seemed to have informed her creation of Uncle Tom, and ultimately Hovet argues convincingly for the identification of that tract as a publication of the ATS entitled

Happy Phebe. However, Hovet's article does little more than offer a comparison of that tract with Stowe's depiction of Uncle Tom. He does nothing to further explore the influence of sentimental tracts on other aspects of Stowe's work, and the author seems content to have solved one small, local mystery over a source. Unfortunately, Maxfield and Hovet seem to represent the only treatment, of any sort, of the connection between sentimentalism and the ATS until Jane Tompkins's insightful piece "'Pray, therefore, without ceasing': From Tracts to Texts" (1983).

Tompkins's essay—eventually incorporated into *Sensational Designs*—represents a much more balanced examination of ATS works by someone who understands both sentimentalism and evangelicalism. Tompkins takes to task those who dismiss the phenomenon of sentimentalism in the early to mid-1800s. She takes particular issue with those would-be detractors of *The Wide Wide World*, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and *The Lamplighter*. Tompkins focuses on the critical argument put forward by Henry Nash Smith and others that sentimentalists did not reflect reality but instead created a literature of reassurance. Tompkins argues that the world reflected in these sentimental novels and the works of the ATS was in harmony with the social, political, and religious discourse of the day (425). Nay-saying critics do not fully understand sentimentalism, Tompkins suggests, because they do not possess the critical tools, mainly an understanding of the nineteenth-century mindset, by which to understand and appreciate it.

In support of this compelling thesis, Tompkins analyzes one specific tract from the ATS, the undated *Ann Eliza Williams*, opening the door for a fruitful investigation of the ATS's vast catalog of publications. Though Tompkins's treatment of her ATS primary source is evenhanded and thorough, the focus of her argument remains the

sentimental bestsellers. She introduces the ATS, but leaves it to others to fully explore the magnitude of the Society's achievements as publishers of sentimental literature and the influence exerted by the Society on these later writers of sentimental fiction.

Tompkins uses the ATS to substantiate her claims about "significant" sentimental works such as those by Stowe, Warner, and Cummins, and her article opens numerous doors for future scholars to map the connections between the Society and the genre. Though she only briefly discusses the publications of the ATS and never acknowledges the texts as a powerful and influential body of sentimental literature in their own right, Tompkins's work has been foundational in making a critical connection between American sentimentalism and the ATS, and her emphasis on the bestsellers rather than the tracts provides an excellent opportunity for a continued exploration of the important place of the ATS in an understanding of the historical development of American sentimentalism.

The core of this project offers an examination of the history and texts of the ATS. In order to illustrate the place the tracts occupy in the history of American sentimentalism, I will explore representative titles from the Society's catalog. Though the ATS's publication list is enormous and widely varied, this study will focus on tracts that include deathbed scenes and that were published between 1814 and 1850, the years between the Society's creation and the publication of *The Wide Wide World*. In the following chapters, I attempt to explain the importance of the ATS to an understanding of the history of American sentimentalism, in terms both of the Society's place in the historical chain of literary influence and its responsibility for the powerful melding of the sentimental and the evangelical.

Outline of Subsequent Chapters

Chapter one, "The Power of 'A Sanctified Press': The History and Mission of the ATS," will provide a detailed exploration of the history of the ATS. Beginning with the Society's British antecedents, the chapter details the creation and development of the Religious Tract Society (RTS) in London in 1799. Drawing on the work done by Hannah More through her Cheap Repository Tracts, the RTS attempted to provide lower class readers with doctrinally sound reading material to combat the evil influences of the French Revolution and industrialization. In the United States, concerned evangelicals also responded to what they perceived to be evil influences and dangerous undercurrents in American society. Not only did the French Revolution raise concern among New England evangelicals, but those evangelicals also kept a wary eye on the political and social upheaval that accompanied the American market revolution and the transformation of the republic into a democracy. The Second Great Awakening and the doctrine of postmillennialism furnished further impetus in the early 1800s for the creation of evangelical missionary organizations, of which the ATS is arguably the most successful in terms of longevity and impact. The religious fervor that swept the country led to widespread attempts to convert the lost, from those living in urban, working class squalor to those living on the western frontier and thus far from the oversight of clergy and congregations. This postmillennial influence led many evangelicals to believe that widespread conversions would precipitate the second coming of Jesus and the establishment of one thousand years of earthly bliss. The ATS began in 1814, and ten years later, it and a number of smaller tract societies decided to pool their resources in an

effort to more effectively wield their combined financial, technological, and geographical advantages.

The ATS chose the tract as its main type of publication due to its brevity, affordability, and accessibility. Though the tract's documented links to revolution and unrest make it seem an unlikely choice for a conservative evangelical organization, the ATS's mission of converting the entire United States and thereby bringing about the second coming of Christ rivals the most revolutionary aims of Paine or Rousseau. Nor was the ATS afraid to embrace technology, particularly the printing press, despite the potential dangers with which the Society's founders associated it. Chapter one will end with a discussion of the relationship between the ATS and popular culture. In an effort to reach the masses with its message of salvation, the ATS was willing to adopt and adapt the predominant literary genre of the early nineteenth century, sentimentalism. Building on the foundation established by Brown, Rowson, and Foster, the ATS co-opted sentimentalism and transformed it from a literature of sympathy into a powerful evangelical tool for reaching the lost.

In the second chapter, "'Here let me finish my existence': The Death Scenes in the Sentimental Novels of Brown, Foster, and Rowson," I will set the stage for the entrance of the ATS into the American literary landscape by examining one of sentimentalism's central motifs, the deathbed scene, in the early works of American sentimentalism. Until the end of the eighteenth century, white Americans largely held to a view of death influenced by the teachings of John Calvin. A belief in the providence of God coupled with Calvinists' uncertainty regarding their own salvation caused fear at the prospect of death. To these early Americans, death was regarded as a punishment for sin.

There existed, in their minds, a clear connection between sin and death. In part, this view stemmed from the inevitable loss of community that accompanied death, and a sense of community was dear to early Americans. Death as punishment severed the sinner from his or her community with great finality. Historians and critics have well-documented this Calvinist view of death and its long-lasting impact on later generations of Americans. Reflecting this influence, many sentimental novelists of the early republic, specifically Brown, Rowson, and Foster, incorporate into their novels a characterization of death that evidences this view. This chapter explores attitudes towards death in the early days of the republic in an effort to explain the portrayals of death in Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1791), and Foster's *The Coquette* (1797). All three novels include deathbed scenes involving seduced single young women who are impregnated and abandoned. In each of the novels, the young woman grows increasingly alienated and isolated, both physically and emotionally, from her family and friends, and thus from her community. In these eighteenth-century sentimental works, the Calvinist view of death leads the protagonists to welcome death as an end to their ignominy and shame rather than as a translation to the heavenly realms.

Chapter three, "'Glory to the Lord! Hallelujah!': The Death Scenes in the Tracts of the ATS," will focus on the ways in which the ATS adopted and then adapted the sentimental deathbed scene. Numerous historians contend that by 1800 much of the Calvinist influence had dissipated in the early republic. Gone with it, in large part, was the belief in a literal Hell. This shift in beliefs allowed for the nineteenth century's romanticizing of death. No longer was death seen as a punishment for sin; instead, death became a sort of homecoming for the faithful. This view characterized death as a

restoration of the community that was lost to the processes of industrialization and revolution described in chapter one. The ATS offered its readers stirring sentimental narratives that focused on the “beautiful death” of young saints. In these narrative tracts, the Society presents tales of young Christians who lead exemplary lives and model true, Christ-like virtue. However, in each of these tracts, the young protagonist is struck ill and suffers a decline that is often painful for the victim but always edifying for the witnesses. Nevertheless, the young sufferer is ultimately ushered into Heaven in a final scene that is celebratory in a way that is decidedly different from the earlier deathbed scenes of Brown, Rowson, and Foster. In each of these later tracts, the protagonist anxiously awaits death, not as an escape from sin and shame but as a reward for a virtuous life. Each of the children’s last days is used for religious instruction, as family and friends gather at the bedside to receive admonitions and exhortations to consider their own lives. Oftentimes, these entreaties are accompanied by the child’s expression of desire for the eternal restoration of community with the loved ones left behind. Echoing Jesus’ words, “Unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of God” (Matt. 18.3), the ATS repeatedly incorporated death scenes involving children to illustrate how each soul should be prepared to meet its Maker.¹³ The Society’s fervor propelled its use of sentimental deathbed scenes in an attempt to bring the reader’s heart to a state of repentance and thus to precipitate widespread conversions and the advent of the millennial reign of Christ. I will explore the deathbed scenes in a representative selection of individual tracts, paying particular attention to the ways in

¹³ In this project, all quotations from scripture and references to the use of scriptural language are drawn from the *The Holy Bible, King James Version* (1977).

which these publications established the conventions of sentimental deathbed scenes as they appear in the sentimental bestsellers of the 1850s.

Chapter four, ““What a thing ‘t is to be a Christian!’: The Death Scenes in the Mid-Nineteenth Century Bestsellers,” will illustrate the similarities between the ATS tracts and the bestsellers of Warner, Cummins, and Stowe as evidenced by their use of the sentimental deathbed scene. Particularly, this chapter examines the death of Alice Humphrey in Warner’s *The Wide Wide World*, the deaths of Mrs. Sullivan and True Flint in Cummins’s *The Lamplighter*, and the deaths of Little Eva and Uncle Tom in Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, all of which resemble the death scenes of ATS publications. In both novels and tracts, the dying protagonist looks forward to death as a passage home. The homecoming to be experienced by the soul in heaven is envisioned as a restoration of community. In both tracts and novels, the dying character exhorts family and friends from the deathbed and verbalizes an acceptance of death as part of God’s plan. Typically, this central character even expresses his or her preference for death over a restoration to health. In addition to the textual similarities, both Stowe and Warner will be shown to have biographical connections to the ATS, suggesting an even greater likelihood of influence. Cummins, as a Unitarian, likely harbored an aversion to the ATS’s publications for reasons that will be discussed. Nevertheless, *The Lamplighter* exhibits many of the same evangelical characteristics as those of her contemporaries, an indication of the pervasiveness of the evangelical influence. The close correlation between the scenes in the novels and in the ATS tracts suggests the ATS’s possible influence on the authors of these bestsellers.

“‘A light spirit for whatever God has in store’: A Concluding Look at One of the Genre’s Descendents,” chapter five, will weigh the significance of the similarities between the tracts and the bestsellers noted in chapter four, and it will consider the probable impact of the ATS on the sentimental bestsellers. That impact is twofold. First, the ATS likely influenced the writers of these novels. The similarities between depictions and the biographical links indicate, at the very least, the potential for influence the ATS may have held over the mid-century authors. Second, the ATS helped solidify the shift in the national view of death from a Calvinist one of fear to an evangelicalized view of death that portrays heaven as home. In so doing, the ATS helped to compensate for the loss of community caused by industrialization by promising reunion in the afterlife and by creating a community of readers in the present. This community of readers helped ensure the success of Warner, Cummins, and Stowe by eagerly embracing the conventional portrayal of death that figures so prominently in their novels. In terms of the critical landscape, this connection between the ATS and the later authors further illustrates the impact of evangelicalism on American sentimentalism. That this impact was affected by an exclusively male publishing board is a fact which complicates the traditional understanding of a feminized sentimental culture posited by Douglas and others. Far from promoting a feeble replacement for Calvinism, the ATS Executive Committee endorsed what David Reynolds calls a “fervent muscular Christianity” (“The Feminization Controversy” 99).¹⁴ The ATS leadership was not a weak coalition of women and effeminate ministers, as Douglas has contended, but a fierce

¹⁴ Though the term “muscular Christianity” typically refers to a strain of Victorian-era, British evangelicalism associated with the writers Charles Kingsley and Thomas Hughes, Reynolds’s use of the term refers to what he calls an “heroic kind of faith” evidenced by both the circuit riders of the old Southwest and the revivalism of Finney.

interdenominational alliance that viewed itself as a battalion of Christian soldiers embarking on a subversive campaign. However, the alliance's goal was not, as Tompkins has argued, to undermine the patriarchy but rather to convert the world to Christ and thus precipitate His second coming. Finally, this study helps to fill the historical and critical gap between 1800 and 1850 by outlining the important work conducted by the ATS in its efforts to convert America through a revisioned brand of American sentimentalism.

CHAPTER I

THE POWER OF "A SANCTIFIED PRESS":

THE HISTORY AND MISSION OF THE ATS

The American Tract Society (ATS) represents an important, unrecognized contributor to the American literary project, particularly to the direction and success of sentimentalism. Through its contributions to publishing and printing technology, literacy, illustrations, marketing, children's literature, and what we would recognize as mass media, the Society altered the course of American popular culture in the nineteenth century. To fully understand the workings and motivations of the ATS, however, one must fully understand the historical and religious context within which the Society worked. An exploration of the ATS's milieu reveals the ways in which the Society combined evangelicalism and sentimentalism into a powerful literary genre. The ATS's early tractarian effort is responsible for a literary version of sentimentalism long attributed to later authors like Stowe, Warner, and Cummins, and that same effort is also partly responsible for the publishing success enjoyed by these later authors.

The History and Influence of the Religious Tract Society

Though one can trace the use of the religious tract back to the Reformation, the ATS's nearest antecedents are located in eighteenth-century London. According to Charles Foster, U.S. benevolent societies are indebted to the English Evangelical United Front and its efforts to save the country from Napoleon and French revolutionary radicalism. One of the more noteworthy examples of these efforts is the "Cheap Repository Tracts" of Hannah More. Published between 1795-1798, this series of pamphlets was designed and written by More for Sunday School pupils to ensure that

suitable reading material was available for children in late eighteenth-century London (Carpenter and Prichard 109). She worked to protect her readers from various sources of vulgarity, including popular chapbooks, Thomas Paine's pamphlets, and French revolutionary propaganda. Her tracts were sold to the middle class and given to the poor; they were designed to exhort, instruct, and exemplify (Feather 162). Significantly, this tractarian frequently copied the style of the very chapbooks she cautioned against in an effort to increase the appeal of her works. For example, More's *The Shepherd of Salisbury Plain* imitates the chapbooks' inclusion of woodcut illustrations with its own pictures of a shepherd identified by his crook and his dog (Stott 175). More's adoption of popular conventions foreshadows the ATS's later co-option of American sentimentalism.

Though More's creation and distribution of cheap religious literature is clearly important to the later workings of the ATS, another outgrowth of the Evangelical United Front is a more easily identifiable antecedent: the Religious Tract Society (RTS). The beginnings of the RTS have been described by Aileen Fyfe, an historian noted for her ongoing work with societal archives at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, who records that the RTS "was formally instituted on 10 May 1799" in London following a "series of early morning meetings in a local coffee house" ("A Short History" 15). Still in operation today, the RTS (according to the website of its successor, Lutterworth Press) was initially conceived to "provide improving literature for young people and adults" (The Lutterworth Press, par. 1). Though Peter Hunt's usually authoritative history of children's literature claims that Hannah More's efforts led to the creation of the RTS (45), others such as Fyfe more convincingly assert that the society

was founded by evangelicals belonging to the London Missionary Society ("Societies as Publishers" 8). Fyfe's assertions are supported by her extensive work with the Lutterworth Press and the RTS archives. In fact, the founders of the RTS set out to disperse tracts that contained doctrine even more evangelical than that of More's offerings (Carpenter and Prichard 447). Like More, the RTS wrote primarily for the lower classes; religious historian Nathan Hatch observes that the publications of the RTS, unlike those of the ATS, carried a note of class condescension, evidenced by their use of nursery language (*The Democratization* 143).¹⁵ Both providers of religious tracts tried to address the same concerns: the corrupting influence of French revolutionaries and the socially dangerous concentration of lower-class illiterates created by industrialization (Feather 161).

Like the Sunday School movement that preceded it, the RTS was founded, in part, as a result of growing concerns about literacy. For eighteenth- and nineteenth-century evangelicals, literacy was a double-edged sword. The influence of Enlightenment thinking on evangelicalism reinforced the benevolent societies' understanding of literacy as essential to salvation, a concern dating to Martin Luther and the Reformation. The conversion process became a reasoned act with the Bible acting as a "sourcebook of religious facts" (Thuesen 33). The unconverted needed to be able to read to discover the gospel plan for themselves; thus the Sunday School movement originated largely as a literacy campaign for the largely uneducated lower classes.

¹⁵ Later instances of these class markers are also noted in Wendy Forrester, *Great-Grandmama's Weekly: A Celebration of the "Girl's Own Paper" 1880-1901*, Lutterworth Press, 1988, particularly in chapters three ("Fiction," pp. 55-68) and four ("Doing Good," pp. 69-84), and to a lesser extent in Jack Cox's *Take a Cold Tub, Sir!: The Story of the "Boy's Own Paper,"* Lutterworth Press, 1982.

Only through increased literacy could widespread conversions take place, and widespread conversions were essential to the advent of Christ's second coming and his thousand-year reign. Evangelicalism and reform were the tools through which the kingdom of God on earth would be ushered in (Gallagher 32). To eighteenth- and nineteenth-century adherents of this doctrine of postmillennialism, history was best viewed through a biblical lens, ascribing divine significance to everyday occurrences. Postmillennialism impelled eighteenth-century British evangelicals, as well as later nineteenth-century American ones, to greater missionary efforts among the lower-class unconverted. Hatch identifies the men of the Enlightenment (Isaac Newton, Benjamin Rush, etc.) as "most notable . . . for their interpretations of prophecy" ("Millennialism" 113). Hatch further identifies a significant body of millennial literature that issued from English, Scottish, and American presses between 1775 and 1815 before concluding that "the first generation of United States citizens may have lived in the shadow of Christ's second coming more intensely than any generation of American Christians" (115).

Though the ability to read scripture was deemed essential, literacy was also potentially dangerous. The newly literate could easily fall prey to the damaging influence of secular fiction. Material with no mention of Christianity was, at best, an "enem[y] cruising under a neutral flag" (Fyfe, "Societies as Publishers" 8). The RTS responded quickly to this need for wholesome reading material, publishing tens of thousands of tracts, sentimentally pious books, and eventually such periodicals as the now famous *Boy's Own Paper*, begun in 1879. Like More, the RTS sought to produce literature that would appeal to the mass market and its newly literate reading body.

Aileen Fyfe has argued that the RTS must be considered a commercial publisher (“Commerce” 165), likening the Society’s organizational structure to a limited liability corporation with the same kind of shareholders, annual meetings, and board of directors (168). Though the Society viewed itself as firmly grounded in the book trade, its distribution methods were unorthodox for the time: curbside hawkers, bazaar stalls, and the later implementation of the *colporteur* system (178).¹⁶ After it became one of the largest and most financially successful of the London publishing societies, the RTS decided to distribute its texts through more traditional existing channels (Fyfe, “Societies as Publishers” 16). Between 1799 and 1825, the RTS was responsible for the publication and distribution of over 60,000,000 copies of the 290 titles in its tract series. Both John Feather and *The Oxford Companion to Children’s Literature* assert that the RTS significantly contributed to the general education and literacy of the English working class (Feather 163; Carpenter and Prichard 447). Fyfe concludes that the RTS managed to stand between two extremes: commercial publisher and charitable benevolent organization (“Societies as Publishers” 29). Because of the flexible nature of its categorization, the RTS was hugely influential, especially in the ways in which it inspired an American version of itself.

Like its English antecedent, the ATS was conceived as a result of uneasiness among American evangelicals regarding changing political and economic climates. For instance, the ATS echoed the RTS’s concerns about the influence of French revolutionaries. Harvey Neufeldt reports that the RTS’s aim of combating publications

¹⁶ A French term for a traveling distributor of tracts, “*colporteur*” is derived from the pack that the distributor carried (*porter*) over his neck (*col*). Used with great success by the ATS, the *colporteur* system is credited by the ATS as being the invention of French Reformers as early as 1524 (ATS, “Instructions” 6).

by the “infidels of France” was mentioned in the ATS’s Annual Report from 1850 (23). ATS founders also shared their British counterparts’ class concerns. Many critics and historians have argued that the primary motivation behind the creation of the American benevolent societies was social control, an attempt to preserve the status quo in the face of growing economic disparity and social changes.¹⁷ Regardless of the veracity of this argument, it is clear that the ATS originated within a distinctly American context, and according to Charles Foster, what began as a conservative coalition in Britain developed into an organization with radical and visionary overtones in the United States.

Despite the eventual differences in development and direction, the connection between the two societies was initially a strong one. Vivian Fowler observes that many of the earliest tracts of the ATS are merely reprints of RTS publications (78). Adrian Brink, managing editor of Lutterworth Press, further illuminates this relationship in an email: “Most of the various early American societies, including the ATS, consciously modeled themselves on the RTS, and . . . both the New England and the New York Societies said that almost all of their early tracts were straight or slightly amended reprints of RTS material, and the ATS cannot have been different. It is hard to think that the ATS, quite apart from getting its inspiration from the RTS, could have grown as quickly as it did without the ready supply of material from London.” This wholesale borrowing evidences the continued reliance of American evangelicals on their British counterparts in the early days of the ATS’s existence. However, Paul Boyer contends that the flow of RTS publications diminished greatly with the outbreak of the War of

¹⁷ Historians who advance the social control argument include John Thomas (657-658), Harvey Neufeldt (1-11), Mark Vasquez (89-100), and, most notably, Clifford Griffin (423). Both David Morgan (*Protestants and Pictures* 20) and John Kuykendall (chapter 1) offer well-reasoned rebuttals of this view.

1812, leading to the formation of the New York Religious Tract Society in that same year (25). The ATS's "The Proceedings of the First Ten Years of the American Tract Society," which chronicles the creation, growth, and subsequent reorganization of the New England Tract Society, appends a report on the progress of the Religious Tract Society, further indicating the close connection between the two. This appendix includes a letter from the RTS to the future ATS mentioning the gift of the British society's entire list of publications: "We have the pleasure also to forward you complete copies of all our publications" (154), a favor the ATS evidently returned. The ATS's website acknowledges the debt the Society owes to these earlier organizations; "Many of the tracts that American Tract first published were picked up from other tract societies that had preceded it" (ATS, "Early History," par. 10). Yet despite the obvious interconnections between the two societies, the ATS ultimately developed in response to uniquely American circumstances.

The ATS's website describes its genesis as a response to three trends: "a spiritual trend, a geographic trend, and a social trend" (ATS, "Early History," par. 5). Though this explanation established by the Society itself oversimplifies the historical complexities of the early 1800s, it is a useful construct for an examination of the context within which the ATS began. Knowledge of the political, economic, and religious currents at the turn of the nineteenth century is vital to a complete understanding of the ATS's beliefs and motivations; therefore, in the following section of this project I offer a necessarily abbreviated and broad treatment of trends and changes that occurred within these three areas.

Historical Context: Social and Political Revolution

In the first few decades following the American Revolution, dramatic changes took place as the patriarchal republic metamorphosed into a democracy. The country saw a decline in the power of traditional authority and an increase of democratic faith in the power of ordinary citizens. Because of these changes, demands for equality began to appear in a wide variety of hitherto relatively unchallenged venues.

Independent thought and action were encouraged by the increasing participation of all socioeconomic classes in the processes of reading and writing, a democratization of America's print culture. This democratization arose from two favorable conditions: an increase in literacy and the emergence of the popular press. For white Americans across the country, literacy rates in the 1790s are among the highest on record, and by 1820, literacy among northern, white Americans was all but universal. Only the poorest could not read. At the same time, the availability of reading material grew exponentially. Increased production of magazines, novels, and newspapers provided the reading masses with greater opportunities for sharing information. By 1800, over 200 newspapers and 90 magazines were in regular circulation. Isabelle Lehuu asserts that the "transformation of the world of print reflected a process of popularization that had important cultural and social consequences" (18). This popularization served as a further catalyst for democratization. In the early years of the republic, reading aloud for an audience of listeners helped to ensure the formation of a group consciousness. By the turn of the century, however, the private act of silent reading had become common practice (Lehuu 15), facilitating the development of individual interpretations and beliefs about the reading material.

The democratizing influence of accessibility and equality was felt in other venues besides print culture. Throughout the new country, state after state withdrew their governmental support from organized religion. As a result, established churches soon experienced a dwindling membership. Those hit hardest were the Episcopal and the Congregational churches, fellowships that had long enjoyed government favor. This religious vacuum, coupled with the increases in structures encouraging independent thinking, led to the development of a new democratic religious pluralism. By 1820, the American religious menu was a smorgasbord of choices: Methodist, Baptist, Disciples of Christ, Universalist, and Presbyterian. The fastest growing choices, Methodist and Baptist, shared common characteristics. Both rejected the need for an educated clergy. Partly because of the democratization of print, religious seekers were encouraged to return to the original Protestant practice of puzzling out the scriptures for themselves instead of relying on a religious authority figure for a definitive interpretation imparted through theological debate. They also rejected the cool rationalism and emotional detachment of organized church ritual. The pursuit of God had become primarily an exercise for the heart rather than the head, reflecting a growing Romantic sensibility. The pull of individual responsibility began to exercise greater influence than Calvinistic determinism in spiritual transformation, a growing democratization of religion.

The push for individuality felt by the religious establishment was also stirring controversy in the political arena. George Washington's presidency (1789-1797) embodied the conflict in the newly-formed country between those who harbored a lingering fondness for the monarchy and those who championed states' rights and individual freedoms. Washington and his Federalist supporters argued that the new

republican government should be afforded centralized power and a strong executive at the helm, demands with which Jeffersonians strongly disagreed. Though events in Europe soon overshadowed the domestic squabbles, the French Revolution (1789-1799) quickly became yet another catalyst for the expression of national differences.

Initially, Americans had supported the French in their bid for republicanism against an absolute monarchy. By 1793, however, mass executions and widespread declarations of war by the French Republic had begun to divide popular American opinion. When war broke out between France and Britain in 1793, Federalists sided with Britain, viewing it as the defender of societal order against the socially disruptive republican anarchy of the French. Jefferson and his followers supported what they saw as the French attempt to carry on the Republican revolution begun in America decades before. John Adams, Washington's Federalist successor, inherited a country in turmoil, one torn by political division within and international hostility without. Continued Federalist support for Britain led to French attacks on American ships (1796-1798). These troubles abroad with France increased public hostilities at home toward the French and their Republican allies. Thomas Jefferson's election in 1800 raised fears among Federalist supporters that the evils of the French Revolution would now be unleashed upon America. Indeed, Jefferson did dispense with many of the trappings of Washington's Federalist state as he outlined his vision for a truly republican government.

In addition to the upheaval in France, other kinds of revolutions left their mark on the fledgling country. From 1815 onward, a revolution in transportation transformed the economic landscape of America. The Erie Canal was completed in 1825, and its existence produced dynamic change along its length in terms of agricultural and

economic development. Developing roadways, waterways, and railroads made travel more accessible, connecting communities and bringing previously remote areas into more frequent contact, thereby increasing commerce. These improvements in transportation thus led to a second revolution: the Market Revolution.¹⁸ No longer did farmers and craftsmen undertake rural outwork for the benefit of their local communities. Instead, they began to create goods for distant markets. New population centers provided increasing demand for food, and farm communities began to offer their crops to towns and cities in exchange for manufactured goods. The Market Revolution disrupted the old ways of living. The self-sustainability of the typical farm family eroded in the face of an increased dependency on markets. Because of this breakdown in the traditional family arrangement, sons could no longer depend on inheriting the family farm, and daughters no longer waited for fathers to provide a dowry and an arranged marriage. The uncertainty occasioned by these socioeconomic changes led to widespread migration. From the South and Northeast, people moved into the new lands of Wisconsin and Michigan. This migration caused fear of a moral decline along the frontier as settlers moved further away from the influence of established religious and social conventions.¹⁹ Clifford Griffin observes that wealthy Easterners were fearful of both western expansion and eastern social change (431, 435). By the 1830s, the Market Revolution had radically

¹⁸First coined by Charles Sellers in his 1994 book, *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846*, the "market revolution" as an historical paradigm has come under recent critique by the work of Seller's former student, Daniel Walker Howe. Howe takes issue with the expression "market revolution" in *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (2007). Howe contends that the expression indicates a drastic change occurred between 1815 and 1848, when in reality "a market economy already existed in the eighteenth-century American colonies" (5). Interestingly, Howe concedes that "markets expanded vastly in the years after the end of the War of 1812," a concession that substantiates the claims of this dissertation.

¹⁹Another area for continued examination is the Society's publication of reform literature. A large number of tracts address the issues of temperance, swearing, and observance of the Sabbath. Each of these can be linked to more widespread reform movements and would provide fertile ground for continued study.

altered the Northeast, redefining traditional family arrangements, patterns of trade, and population distribution. However, this change only foreshadowed the societal and economic upheaval experienced over the next fifty years.

In the five decades following 1820, during the Industrial Revolution, America experienced its greatest period of urban growth. Due to the increases and developments in transportation and therefore to the new consumers created by the Market Revolution, production of goods became centralized and industrial centers developed during these decades. This growth was felt most keenly in New England factory towns that produced goods for rural consumption. In these towns, a newly wealthy middle class lived side by side with poverty-stricken laborers and factory workers. The distinctions of social class were readily apparent. Large concentrations of the illiterate poor were viewed as dangerous flashpoints for social unrest.

Out of this turbulent period of revolution and technological advancement, a distinctive type of American culture was beginning to develop, one that valued self-determination and private life. Increasingly, the deterministic tenets of Calvinism made less sense, and Christians began to hearken to revivalist Charles Grandison Finney's description of man as a "free moral agent."

Historical Context: The Second Great Awakening and Postmillennialism

The political and social revolutions occurring in nineteenth-century America provide a partial context for an explanation of the ATS's genesis. A closer look at the Second Great Awakening, the religious context from which the ATS and other religious societies emerged in nineteenth-century America, helps to complete the picture. At the end of the eighteenth century, religious revival once again began to sweep across

America. This so-called Second Great Awakening mirrored many of the characteristics of America's earlier spiritual "awakening" of the 1730s and 1740s. The Second Great Awakening, so named by historians for the renewed sense of spirituality that its participants exhibited, was a religious movement freighted with emotion and characterized by weeping and ecstatic utterances. By the early nineteenth century, this second revival had been fine-tuned by such ministers as Lyman Beecher, Barton Stone, and Charles Grandison Finney to generate maximum conversions through the use of emotional personal narratives rather than dry doctrinal debate. Julius Rubin posits that the movement likely affected one-third to one-half of all people living at the time (125). The movement peaked in the decade following Charles Finney's 1830 sermon series in Rochester, New York (Johnson 3). In those sermons, Finney declared that "God has made man a moral free agent," and he called for Christians to unite in their efforts to "convert the world and bring on the millennium" (Johnson 3-4). Garth Rosell contends that what Finney accomplished was "to popularize a millennial ideology that helped to galvanize existing benevolent agencies into a broadly popular campaign both to convert sinners and involve them in the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth" (146).

Finney was a lawyer-turned-preacher who focused his particular brand of revival spectacle and showmanship on the heart of New York's "Burned-Over District," an area of the state repeatedly visited by fiery evangelicals bent on converting the lost. Finney appealed to the emotions of his hearers (Rosell 136), since he believed that authentic excitement came from an encounter with the truth (138). His sermons in Rochester fanned into flame the embers of religious revival that had been smoldering intermittently in various New England locales since shortly before the turn of the century. Paul

Johnson records that these early flickers of revivalism had a “gradual, provincial character,” where “enthusiasm sputtered . . . , arbitrarily descending on one congregation or community while neighboring churches slept (4). Finney’s efforts, on the other hand, were set apart by their sheer size and denominational unity.

Finney’s sermon sounded the death knell for Calvinism’s popularity through his pronouncements of free moral agency. John Thomas has argued that “the central fact in the romantic reorientation of American theology was the rejection of determinism” (658). One of the strongest appeals of the message of Finney and others was an emphasis on personal responsibility and personal interpretation of scripture. The emerging middle class exhibited a distrust of the religious elite; this distrust mirrored a more widely-held secular resentment of the aristocracy typical in the early days of the republic. Average Americans responded to the revivalist’s call to study scripture, and scripture only, for themselves; “no creed but the Bible” was the rallying cry of many evangelicals. Nathan Hatch echoes this idea in his observation that the distinctive feature of American evangelical religion was the attempt to disentangle the pure teachings of Scripture from the corruptions of any human mediation (“Millennialism” 122). This emphasis, coupled with the concept of free will, allowed for a more democratic Christianity.

The Second Great Awakening’s impact varied according to region. In western New York, it resulted in the establishment of such new denominations as Free Presbyterian and Freewill Baptist (Johnson 116-117). Throughout Kentucky and Tennessee, the revivalist impulse helped develop new evangelistic strategies, particularly the camp meeting. In New England, it created inter-denominational cooperation and increased support for benevolent societies, events key to this discussion. Regardless of

its local impact, the Second Great Awakening promoted a nationwide interest in the conversion of lost souls. Missionary societies began to appear, along with the demand for religious literature.²⁰

Essential to these evangelistic impulses was one of the prime motivating doctrinal forces of the day: postmillennialism. Millennialism originates in the apocalyptic literature of the Old Testament (Daniel and Isaiah) and New Testament (particularly Revelation), which casts humanity's future in prophetic, and thus figurative, terms. Millennialism (both postmillennialism and premillennialism) is concerned with the return of Christ, prophesied in Revelation 20, and with his subsequent one-thousand-year reign, experienced as a Golden Age before the ultimate judgment. James H. Moorhead, Professor of American Church History at Princeton Theological Seminary, argues that images from the book of Revelation were prevalent in the imaginations of nineteenth-century Americans ("Between Progress" 524), and postmillennialists depended on a literal interpretation of the book for their understanding of world and national events. The postmillennial doctrine argued that Christ's second coming would follow a gradual process of improvement and conversion that would usher in the "age of peace and righteousness" (Quandt 393). Unlike premillennialists, who believed in the apocalyptic return of Christ followed by his one-thousand-year earthly reign, the postmillennialists believed "in the gradual redemption of the world under the influence of Christ's spirit rather than his physical presence" (Quandt 391). The postmillennial reading of everyday events was intertwined not only with the average Christian's understanding of his or her

²⁰ An area for continued research involves the role of nationalism and imperialism in the formation and development of missionary societies. One such recent study is Jennifer Fish Kashay's "Agents of Imperialism: Missionaries and Merchants in Early-Nineteenth-Century Hawaii." Though antithetical to this study's focus, such an examination of the ATS might yield interesting findings.

role in life but also with his or her understanding of the country's role in world history. According to James Moorhead, the concept of postmillennialism is key to an understanding of America's vision of itself as a Redeemer nation ("Between Progress" 524). Ralph Wood explains that nineteenth-century American evangelicals typically believed that the millennial kingdom would begin in the United States, which would serve as a flagship for the rest of the world (62). Postmillennialism provides a fascinating lens through which to view the actions of the evangelical community, and particularly the ATS, at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, with Calvinism losing its stranglehold on American religion and the doctrine of free will gaining prominence, postmillennialism became both an instructive framework through which to view the past and a potent motivating vision for the future. Nathan Hatch posits that postmillennialism found its beginnings in Enlightenment thinking ("Millennialism" 113). The belief offered its adherents a rational way of viewing God's involvement in history and His plan for the future. By the early nineteenth century, evangelicals had come to view scripture as a sourcebook of religious facts (Thuesen 33).

Paired with a belief in free will, postmillennialism provided Evangelicals with a strong impetus to act. If those about them were free moral agents rather than predestined, and if the millennium would be ushered in by mass conversions, then it was imperative that Christians do their best to bring their sinful neighbors to a state of conviction and repentance. Moorhead contends that anticipation of the Apocalypse produced revivals, missionary work, and benevolent causes as a way of precipitating the Kingdom of God

on earth (“Between Progress” 524). Of particular interest to this study is the influence this anticipation likely had on the work of the ATS.

Because of the denominationally diverse membership of its governing board and the widespread acceptance of the postmillennial doctrine, the ATS’s direction and strategies were likely influenced by millenarian concerns from one or more of its board members. The original Executive Committee, formed in 1825, included James Milnor (Protestant Episcopal), Gardiner Spring (Presbyterian), John Knox (Reformed Dutch Protestant), Justin Edwards (Congregational Christian), Charles G. Sommers (Baptist), and John Summerfield (Methodist Episcopal)—all six representatives of denominations with doctrinal links to postmillennialism. Moorhead argues that “the American Tract Society . . . frequently offered a postmillennial rationale” for its efforts “to make the nation and the world Christian” (“Apocalypticism” 469). Certainly, the doctrine’s influence can be seen in the harmony with which the different denominations represented by the members of the Executive Committee worked and labored. This spirit of cooperation arose from a sense of shared responsibility for lost souls. Moorhead further observes that millennial glory could be achieved only through the efforts of believers (“Between Progress” 527). If they worked diligently, then, as Charles Finney preached, “the millennium may come in this country in three years” (Rosell 140). However, if they were lax in their efforts, the arrival of the one thousand years of bliss would surely be retarded.

Of their newly organized efforts, the Executive Committee wrote the following in their address to the “Christian Public”:

Who can tell but the present is an instance of harmony and co-operation which will prepare the way for other and more important instances, when in unity of faith and unity of spirit, no benevolent enterprise shall fail through the discordancy of Christians, and when in every cause that demands prompt and extended co-operation, the friends of the Redeemer shall know how to combine their energies against the common foe? Who will not say, "The Lord hasten it in his time!" "Thy watchmen shall lift up the voice; with the voice *together* shall they sing; for they shall see *eye to eye, when the Lord shall bring again Zion.*"

(ATS, *Address 10*)

These lines, including the quotation of Isaiah 52.8, indicate the urgency and eagerness with which the ATS embraced its mission and the potential for great success. The authors' own italics indicate their emphasis on the Second Coming, "when the Lord shall bring again Zion."

Though some have argued that many conservative evangelicals employed postmillennialism as a "means of keeping society godly and orderly, stable and quiet" (Griffin 428)—that is, to preserve the status quo—others clearly see a more subversive goal for the doctrine in action. The majority of postmillennial evangelicals were consciously promoting what Moorhead calls "a new model of society" ("Between Progress" 530). The children of Lyman Beecher, for instance, often heard their father pray for the violent overthrow of despotic governments through war and upheaval (535). Because of the composition of its Executive Committee, the ATS quite possibly shared that subversive goal of a new world order.

Influenced by postmillennial doctrine, the Society advocated widespread conversions in an effort to move the nation and the world closer to God. This effort is evidenced by the following exemplary passage, which borrows proof texts from Jeremiah 31.34, Isaiah 11.9, and Habakkuk 2.14:

While all exert a mutual influence in promoting each others [sic] salvation, they may lay the foundation for millions and millions of silent but pungent preachers of righteousness to go forth and speak each one to an individual, a family, a neighbourhood, till they shall have no need to say any more, "Know ye the Lord, for all shall know him from the least to the greatest;" and the whole "earth be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters fill the sea."

(ATS, "Proceedings" 102)

The responsibility for evangelism lay with every Christian. David Morgan, an acclaimed art historian and author of numerous books on "visual piety" (studies of the history of mass-produced religious visual culture), characterizes the primary religious beliefs of the period as follows: 1) that converting others was of paramount importance, and 2) that these conversions would inaugurate the one thousand years of peaceful reign prophesied in Revelation (*Protestants and Pictures* 14). These two beliefs provided a potential rallying point for America's religiously pluralistic landscape to unite in action.

The Birth and Development of the ATS

The Second Great Awakening engendered feelings of good will, optimism, and cooperation among several mainstream Christian denominations in New England, including Episcopalians, Methodists, Presbyterians, Baptists, and Congregationalists. The ATS is one of five significant religious societies created as a result of this

collaboration; the others were the American Education Society, the American Bible Society, the American Sunday School Union, and the American Home Missionary Society. Religious historian John Kuykendall refers to these collectively as the “Big 5.” Each of these five sprang from evangelical origins.

The American Education Society began in 1815 in Boston with the express goal of furnishing “pious and indigent youth, of the Presbyterian denomination, who have the gospel ministry in view, with the means of pursuing their academical [sic] and theological studies” (American Presbyterian Church, “The Education Question,” par. 9). The American Bible Society was founded in 1816 with the mission of “translation, publication and the distribution of Bibles to as many people as possible” (American Bible Society, par.1). The American Sunday School Union originated in Philadelphia in 1824; the Union had as its goal “the organization and support of Sunday schools in needy communities not otherwise provided with Sunday schools” (Bender, par. 1). In 1974, the Union changed its name to the American Missionary Fellowship, reflecting the evolution of its evangelical tools over the previous century from Sunday schools to domestic missions (American Missionary Fellowship, par. 2). The American Home Missionary Society began by consolidating smaller societies such as the United Domestic Missionary Society into one larger organization in 1826. Its focus was domestic missions, including the monetary support of small congregations throughout America until they gained financial independence (The American Presbyterian Church, “The Home Missionary Question,” par. 3). Like the American Home Missionary Society, the ATS consolidated numerous smaller societies under one roof in 1825 in an effort “to make Jesus Christ known in His redeeming grace . . . by the circulation of Religious Tracts” (American

Tract Society, "Early History," par. 1). However, for the ATS, that consolidation of effort had been already ten years in the making.

Though the ATS emerged as a collaborative enterprise in 1825, the American origins of the Society appear as early as 1814. In the first decades of the nineteenth century, Bible societies, tract societies, and evangelical associations were formed in an effort to bring the nation closer to God through the dissemination of the written word. David Paul Nord explains that the New England Tract Society (NETS) was formed in 1814 by Jedidiah Moore, a strict Congregationalist, in reaction to fears that the traditional institutions of social order—the church and state—were falling into the hands of the Unitarians and the Republicans ("Evangelical Origins" 3). These fears resulted in a perceived loss of power among the Federalists that corresponded to a loss in the power of the church and a subsequent loss in the power to reach lost souls. Evangelicals began to turn to voluntary organizations for the work of moral and spiritual regeneration. This reliance on private societies gave rise to the formation of over forty different organizations prior to 1825.

Each of these societies was zealous in its desire to spread the gospel. The NETS published over 4,000,000 tracts in its first 10 years of existence. This society developed a system of 200 auxiliaries in 21 states and territories to assist in distribution. Founded just a few years earlier in 1812, The New York Tract Society (NYTS) trailed the NETS with the distribution of 2,000,000 tracts in its first 13 years of service. However, the individual societies began to recognize limitations associated with denominationalism and logistics, including less sophisticated methods of distribution and divided capital resources.

In 1825, representatives of the NETS and the NYTS, the two largest societies in the United States, converged in New York to discuss a merger. Spiritual trends (The Second Great Awakening), geographical trends (the rapid expansion of the American frontier), and social trends (the substantial increase in immigration between 1800 and 1820) had all engendered a much larger body of nonbelievers than any one tract society could effectively reach. A merger would allow for a consolidation of physical, financial, and spiritual resources. After much debate, the two organizations joined under the banner of the newly formed American Tract Society, which chose New York as its headquarters because of its access to capital, technology, and means of distribution. Uniting their resources provided evangelicals with a much more effective weapon with which to wage spiritual battle in a rapidly growing country perceived by those evangelicals as being on the verge of a moral decline.

Despite the spirit of cooperation and blurring of denominational lines evidenced by the creation of the "Big 5," only the ATS represented a truly inter-denominational effort. The other societies directed their efforts to more or less specifically denominational targets, the segment of the religious population to which they directed their support. The American Home Missionary Society and the American Education Society existed primarily to assist Presbyterians and Congregationalists, and by 1861, they were assisting solely Congregationalists (Griffin 424). The American Bible Society (founded by prominent Presbyterian layman Elias Boudinot²¹) and the American Sunday

²¹ Boudinot served as President of the Continental Congress from 1782 to 1783, later represented New Jersey in the House of Representatives from 1789 to 1795, and ended his government service as Director of the United States Mint from 1795 to 1805. Boudinot was a devout Presbyterian and a strong supporter of Native American rights. He enjoyed a close friendship with the Cherokee Galleghina Watie, who later adopted his friend and benefactor's name as his own. Watie published and edited the first Native American newspaper, *The Cherokee Phoenix*.

School Union also focused their initial efforts predominantly on behalf of Presbyterians. The ATS, on the other hand, stipulated in its constitution that its publishing committee must be composed of one member each from at least five different mainline denominations (American Tract Society, *Address* 24). This policy reflected the cooperative approach of its forerunner, the RTS. According to its by-laws, the RTS “had to include an equal number of members for Church and Dissent,” the former referring to the Church of England or Anglicans and the latter typically consisting of Congregationalists, Baptists, and Methodists (Fyfe, “Commerce and Philanthropy” 169). The structure of the ATS’s publication board ensured only the publication of materials with the widest acceptance. Thus, the ATS best represents an inter-denominational society and the spirit of cooperation. For this reason, the ATS offers the best glimpse into what mainline evangelicals were hoping to accomplish through their collaborative efforts.

The difference in emphasis between the ATS and the remaining members of the Big 5 provides another compelling reason to single out the ATS for study. Both the American Education Society and the American Home Missionary Society worked to produce and support ministers (Griffin 424). These two societies focused on personnel rather than literature, whether through scholarships to seminaries or through the support of pastors already in the field. The American Bible Society produced only “Holy Scriptures without note or comment” (Dwight 597) while the American Sunday School Union made Sunday School lessons its area of emphasis. The ATS, in contrast to the narrow print focus of its sister organizations, produced an immense body of varied

literature that eventually included, in addition to tracts, toy books, novels, newspapers, magazines, and wall calendars.

The Society decided upon tracts, small cheaply-bound volumes of usually fewer than fifty pages, as its publication of choice for their affordability, brevity, simplicity, and dispensability. In its *Address of the Executive Committee of the ATS to the Christian Public*, the Society's organizers rhapsodize about the suitability of tracts to their enterprise: "the Committee feel that it is needless to exhibit, to any considerable extent, the superior advantages of that method of moral and religious instruction which is pursued by the distribution of Tracts" (4). In these brief texts, the authors tried to break through the boundary of print and achieve an immediacy that would sway the reader's heart and mind. For this reason, tract authors frequently employed first-person address. David Morgan explains this preference for first-person narration as an attempt to mimic the personal evangelistic encounter (*Protestants and Pictures* 25). In addition to their immediacy and accessibility, Paul Boyer argues that the tract met two other needs as well: it could be adapted to urban realities, and it was not too forbidding economically in terms of production or purchase costs (22). For the wide variety of reasons named above, the tract was particularly well suited to the needs and aims of the ATS from the Society's earliest days onward. These inexpensive booklets quickly became the ATS's most popular form of publication (Blodgett 23).²²

However, the ATS did not simply consider cost when it adopted the tract as its medium of choice. It also took into account the tract's long history of subversion, as I

²² Indeed, tracts have remained the primary publication focus of the ATS throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. The ATS continues to devote the majority of its printing resources to evangelical tracts. In 2005's annual report, the Society reports the distribution of 29,418,284 tracts worldwide (7). In that same year, 66 new tracts were added to the Society's catalog ("2005 Annual Report" 8).

will explain shortly. The tract's history has been more than simply that of a "proselytizing religious pamphlet," as Gregory Haynes pejoratively categorizes it (17). Though Peter Hunt notes that educational tracts formed the core of "respectable" children's literature before 1800 (44), the medium has a long history as a literature of censure used frequently in religious clashes. Martin Luther wrote his most famous tracts in 1520, in which he exposed the corruption of the church and the papacy. Between 1588 and 1589, the anonymously-authored Marprelate Tracts attacked the episcopacy of the Anglican Church. John Milton was one of many who penned subversive tracts throughout the mid-1600s, in his case advocating freedom of the press and divorce and contesting forms of church government and the re-establishment of the monarchy. In America, Thomas Paine had successfully employed tracts, most notably "Common Sense," in his work as a revolutionary propagandist. The tract also played an important subversive role in the French Revolution. In France, the tract was a tool for public censure, exposing governmental abuses and advocating new systems of rule.

The early publications of the ATS indicate its awareness of the tract's historically subversive use. The *Address of the Executive Committee* reassures readers that the Society was aware of the effects of popular tracts:

We are not ignorant of the alarming success with which Voltaire and his infidel associates on the continent of Europe, and elsewhere, proved the efficacy of this method of access to the common people, in producing one of the most terrible moral convulsions which have ever shaken the world. (7)

Despite what the ATS perceived to be the potentially dangerous power of the tract, the Society's choice of medium was dependent, at least in part, on its observation of this very

power. If this publication type could be used for what the ATS perceived to be evil ends, why could it then not be used to affect an equally dramatic, but righteous, revolution? Indeed, Mark Vasquez, whose scholarship focuses on religious and educational discourses in nineteenth-century New England, refers to the religious tract as the most widely distributed and potentially influential genre of the first two decades of the nineteenth century (90). For the ATS, this historical influence exerted by tracts provided an additional rationale for adopting them as the medium of choice.

Technology was another double-edged sword that the ATS was willing to wield to its advantage. Numerous scholars cite the pioneering work of the ATS in areas such as illustration, binding, distribution methods, management techniques, and marketing,²³ despite the Society's innovative methods, the religious publishers had a love/hate relationship with technology. In its "Instructions of the Executive Committee of the American Tract Society, to Colporteurs and Agents," the Society warns against the dangers of the press. "It should not be forgotten, that the agency which is so potent as a means of intellectual and spiritual elevation, may have equal power for evil when employed by infidel or irreligious hand" (8). Like their Reformation predecessors, the executive committee believed the press possessed a power for evil that could produce infidelity, immorality, and error. The Society criticized Voltaire for his use of modern printing methods to produce and distribute damaging literature, protesting that he and "his associates employed it for obliterating the last traces of the religion of the Reformation, and for corrupting and infuriating the populace" (8). However, the

²³ While many studies acknowledge the advances made by the ATS in these areas, Stephen Slocum's "The American Tract Society: 1825-1975" (1975) and Lawrance Thompson's "The Printing and Publishing Activities of the ATS from 1825 to 1850" (1941) provide rare, detailed accounts of the ATS's publishing and technological feats.

executive committee of the ATS was savvy enough to recognize an important development. If Voltaire could use modern printing methods for evil, what was to stop the ATS from employing and improving those same methods for good? In Nord's words, "to defeat the 'Satanic press,' the religious publishers proposed to engage the enemy on his own ground, on his own terms, with his own weapons" ("Religious Reading" 251). Although the ATS was leery of the dangers of the press, it eagerly embraced innovations that led to the dissemination of the gospel. It was willing, as R. Laurence Moore has noted, to "fight fire with fire" (*Selling God* 17).

So, without much hesitation, the newly established ATS began production using stereotype, an innovative printing technology. This was followed shortly thereafter by the introduction of the steam-driven press, which underwent continual fine tuning at the hands of the ATS. Nathan Hatch notes that the Society implemented steam-powered printing four years prior to its use at Harper Brothers Publishers (*The Democratization* 144). In fact, one of the prime reasons for the establishment of the Society's headquarters in New York was the access to capital and technology that the city offered. By 1846, the Society had begun to use an advanced type of roller press, of which it had seventeen in all, housed in fifty-three rooms of the its New York office building. The five-story headquarters housed thirty printers to work the presses with one hundred more employees at work in the bindery room (Boyer 26). David Morgan describes the printing press as the preeminent emblem of the modern age of church history ("Protestant Visual Practice" 39). The ATS was also a pioneer in the production of a paper-making machine, thereby eliminating the need for outside suppliers. Both the printing technology and the

distribution methods illustrate the ATS's willingness to borrow secular means to accomplish sacred ends.

In addition to its printing processes, the ATS implemented a highly organized system of distribution that evolved into *colportage*. In the year following its consolidation in 1825, the ATS printed 700,000 publications. But perhaps its most ambitious undertaking was its plan in 1829 to supply everyone in the United States with at least one Bible or tract. This plan, known as the "General Supply," began in New York City with a process called the "Systematic Monthly Distribution." By 1831, 5,000,000 pages per year were being supplied to 36,000 families using a system of almost 700 distributors. Seeking even greater levels of permeation, the society continued to develop its systematic distribution methods on a national level using *colportage*.

The system's mission was tripartite; *colporteurs* were commissioned for the purpose "of awakening the attention of the Christian community to the character and claims of the Institution; securing the personal co-operation of the friends of the Redeemer, and effecting the circulation of the Society's publications . . . among all classes of our fellow-citizens" (ATS, *Colporteur's Commission*). The ATS equipped evangelistically-minded representatives with suitcases full of tracts and Bibles and sent them to the frontier or remote regions. Working as salaried employees, these *colporteurs* fulfilled a number of duties in their jobs. They led prayer meetings, reported on the morality of their regions, and often established Sunday schools for the purpose of teaching literacy. The diverse ranks of the *colporteur* army included evangelists, rugged frontiersman, and seminary students on summer vacation.

The success of the colporteur system derived from what the society called “two of the mightiest elements of influence”: the power of Christian example and a “sanctified press” (ATS, “The American Colporteur System” 3). These two elements were combined in the act of the Christian colporteur distributing society publications. These colporteurs encountered all walks of American life and were largely responsible for literacy along the frontier.²⁴ Used by the ATS to enhance distribution of its products, the colportage system represents a highly efficient, early form of door-to-door canvassing in America. Though not organized on a grand scale until 1841, the ATS’s colporteur system enjoyed great success through the efforts of some 30,000 voluntary workers prior to that year. By 1850, the Society had over 600 colporteurs in the field, each of whom filed monthly field reports that contained a wealth of sociological information, of which unfortunately only a few have survived.

Although its ambitious plan for complete systematic distribution failed to materialize, the ATS is quite possibly the most widely distributed and widely read publisher in American literary history. The Society embraced technology, science, and invention as tools to be used in service of the heavenly kingdom, allowing it to more effectively enlarge the scope of its evangelistic efforts (Quandt 393). David Nord categorizes the ATS as a “major manufacturing concern” (“Benevolent Capital” 156), while a multitude of others have credited the Society with having an inestimable impact on literacy, publishing, religion, and popular culture.

²⁴ The archives of the ATS in Garland, Texas, contain a wealth of ATS publications besides tracts, including wall calendars, novels, reference books, and colporteur reports. A systematic examination of the surviving colporteur reports could prove particularly interesting as they would provide detailed demographic information for different regions of the country and could be used in a study of spreading literacy in the early part of the nineteenth century.

The ATS's Adoption of Popular Literature

In the same way that it adopted the printing press to serve its ends, the ATS also co-opted aspects of nineteenth-century popular culture in an effort to reach the unconverted. As is true for many religious organizations, the relationship between the ATS and secular mainstream culture was initially a strained one. This was particularly true for the Society in the years immediately following its merger in 1825. The founders were especially concerned about the corrupting influence of an important segment of the secular culture, its literature. In general, the ATS harbored the same sort of early nineteenth-century suspicion of fiction that caused Susanna Rowson, among others, to insist in her bestselling novel *Charlotte Temple* that she was creating a work of nonfiction. The democratization of print led to increasing alternatives in reading material, and the early publications of the ATS offer numerous examples of its stated opposition to popular literature.

Repeatedly, primary documents indicate the Society's concern over the ability of "vile, licentious literature" to corrupt the minds of unsuspecting readers, shrinking intelligence, causing depravity, and igniting "unholy passions" (ATS, "Instructions" 9). The ATS's executive committee also believed that reading popular fiction left one particularly unsuited for the kind of careful reading necessary for a study of the Bible by "deadening the conscience to the claims of the gospel; undermining or counteracting influences that might result, with the divine blessing, in the salvation of the soul." In one publication, the Executive Committee writes, "Fiction also lamentably pervades our own country. . . . This misnamed 'literature' has demoralized thousands of the unsuspecting, and is known to have been the occasion of ruin to many of both sexes by its polluting

pages" ("Instructions" 8-9). The *Eleventh Annual Report* also rails against popular literature. Released in 1836, the report offers a strict condemnation of popular fiction. Maria Edgeworth is singled out for specific attack. Her sentimental stories are noted to be inoffensive and moral to some degree. However, she makes a critical error in authorial judgment in that her stories fail to mention religion, luring readers into a false sense of morality without religiosity. Sir Walter Scott is also identified as a corruptor of innocence. In other works, the ATS equates the "ravages" of reading fiction with those of intemperance.

Though the founders of the ATS considered the reading of fiction to be morally dangerous, they also recognized its power and appeal. The ATS discovered that it would need to adjust its methods in order to make its religious texts as attractive as the secular market offerings. To that end, religious writers began consciously to enter the popular marketplace of writing and print. The ATS started its foray into popular culture with the publication of the *Christian Almanac*, the first issue of which appeared in 1821, pioneering the Society's methods of adopting the secular in an attempt to disseminate the sacred (Blodgett 23). Soon, religious writers became cultural entrepreneurs (Moore, *Selling God* 19), working to earn spiritual rather than commercial gain.²⁵ For the purposes of this project, the ATS's entrance into the marketplace of popular culture is seen most significantly in the society's embrace of the predominant literary genre of the period, sentimentalism.

²⁵ Even today, the ATS continues its work as cultural entrepreneurs. An examination of the Society's website (www.atstracts.org) reveals the continued exploration of popular culture themes and icons. New tract offerings from the Society include a number of Hollywood-derived titles and images. *You Can Be Transformed* uses allusions to and stills from the *Transformers* movie. *Harry Potter's World* includes a picture of the boy wizard and uses the same font and logo as J.K. Rowling's books. *Desperate Lives* features the white picket fence and blue sky made famous by the television show *Desperate Housewives*. In fact, the website has an entire category labeled "Movie/Television Tracts," featuring a wide array of offerings that incorporate material from current blockbuster films and Emmy-winning television programs.

The ATS recognized the enormous popularity of sentimentalism. It also recognized a characteristic of sentimentalism that echoed its own religious understanding as formed by the Second Great Awakening: the privileging of emotional experience. The genre was a perfect match for the religious leanings of the day; sentimentalism and revivalism were linked by their common classical appeal to pathos.

As already noted, nineteenth-century revivalism was an emotive experience, laden with weeping, barking, seizures, and ecstatic utterances. Revival preachers began to abandon doctrine-filled discourses in favor of stirring personal narratives. David Reynolds acknowledges that revivalists, particularly “the prominent clergymen of the liberal Protestant and modified Calvinist mainstream,” preferred sentimental stories with their presentation of deathbed scenes and heavenly homecomings (“From Doctrine” 493). Accordingly, the writers for the ATS soon followed suit, moving away from doctrine-filled pamphlets toward emotionally charged stories. Reynolds contends that by 1850, American tract authors had rejected doctrinal treatises and replaced them with sentimental stories that filled the public demand for religious entertainment (480). A close examination of the Society’s annual reports from 1814 to 1824 evidences that this shift among tract writers had begun to take place far earlier than 1850. The 1814 proceedings list the tracts that had been printed in the previous three months. Titles such as *The Work of the Holy Spirit, On the Third Commandment* (“You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the Lord your God” as listed in Exodus 20.7), *Three Dialogues between a Minister and Parishioner*, and *On Moderation in Food* indicate the Society’s interest in theological discourse (“Proceedings” 24-25). However, the 1820 report records the publication of *Little Henry and his Bearer* and *The Happy Waterman*

(65), while the 1821 report includes *The Busy Bee*, *Catherine Haldane*, and *The Two Sisters*, titles that are indicative of their narrative approach (75). By the tenth report in 1824, seven of the twenty-two newly printed tracts listed appear to be narratives compared to six of fifty in the first report of 1814 (127), indicating an increase in narratives from 12% to 32%.

David Nord points out that the Society's founders "were willing to fight evil literature with a similar, though sacred, style of simple, popular, sentimental, narrative literature" ("Religious Reading" 246). The narratives of the ATS soon became strikingly similar to the sentimental novels that the Society warned against in its own publications. So close became the link between the two that Jane Tompkins describes sentimentalism as the "most influential expression of the beliefs that animated the revival movement and had shaped the character of American life in the years before the Civil War" ("Pray" 426). The ATS could not have chosen a literary genre more fully suited to its aims.

The ATS carefully evaluated the new reading public and identified it as a body that wanted to be entertained but needed to be instructed. The Society moved quickly to fill this need for entertainment that was nonetheless religious. The writers preferred using the imagery of sentiment, such as orphaned children, destitute families, and deathbed repentance, to move the hearts of their readers, hoping "to get a man in a state that would merit forgiveness" (Griffin 425). Gregory Haynes observes that these sentimental images appeared primarily in juvenile tracts, which until 1832 constituted the majority of the Society's publications (18). Typically, the tracts followed a didactic narrative formula, one that included at least two stock characters: the poor person rich in religious piety and the "prodigal son" who experiences deathbed repentance (18). The

following examples illustrate the Society's predilection, early on in its history, for sentimental narratives of the type described by Reynolds.

Bible Happiness; or, Comfort in Affliction and A Noble Youth; or, William Mason offer excellent examples of typical Society publications with the financially poor/spiritually rich stock character as the narrative's protagonist. Neither tract is dated, but their numbers, 11 and 27 respectively, indicate fairly early publication, possibly as early as 1832 (Wolfe, par. 7).

In *Bible Happiness*, the female narrator shares the story of an eighty-three-year-old woman who depends on her daughter, a widow, for her maintenance and care. The old woman suffers from rheumatism and arthritic pain, but she is very happy. The narrator, who has come to visit the old woman, describes her clothing as "coarse, but as clean as possible" (6). Her visitor asks her how she can be so happy in the face of so much pain, and she replies, "I am happy; my cup overflows with blessings; I have every thing I need, and much more than I deserve" (7). The elderly woman claims that she has great comforts, to which the first-person narrator responds, "'Comforts!' I said, looking round the small and poorly furnished room; 'pray tell us whence your comforts spring?'" (7). What follows is the old woman's account of her husband's death and her subsequent conversion. After the narrator parts from her, the author of the tract addresses the reader directly. "Are you enduring the wants of poverty, or the pains of disease? She was the subject of all these temporal evils; yet she was contented and happy, because she trusted in God" (15). In typical fashion, the account of this poor, pious character is followed by an admonition to the reader to consider his or her own sinful condition.

A Noble Youth offers much the same approach. In this story, the tract's narrator sees William Mason, a neighborhood youth, walking in the rain. The narrator's father points out William as an example of a noble youth, known for his character. Father declares, "William's character must be estimated by his conduct, not by the present appearance of his clothes" (5). After this admonition, the narrator's father launches into a lengthy account of William's personal history. As a small child, he was "vicious in his habits, and dirty in his appearance" (6). A reminder from one of his early teachers that he could die at any time arrests his poor behavior, and "for the first time in his life, he began to pray" (7). Soon, his prayerful example transforms his drunken father, and the man never touches alcohol again. To help support his poor family, William takes a job with a local blacksmith shop. Here he is surrounded by evil influences, but "though he was obliged to work hard all the week at the forge, yet he always contrived to learn his catechism and scripture" (10). Ultimately, William's parents are seriously injured when their boarding house collapses, and the young man is forced to work long hours to provide for their needs as invalids. At the conclusion of this tale, the narrator's father again raises William as a model for his son to follow: "Such is the conduct of this noble youth—noble, not by birth or parentage, but for his upright and Christian conduct—noble, not on account of the perishable riches of time, but of those treasures which neither moth nor rust can corrupt" (15). Once again, the financially poor, but spiritually rich, stock character is used to encourage the reader to consider his or her own condition, stressing particularly that the financial poverty so prevalent among the tract's recipients was no excuse for poverty of spirit.

In two other ATS publications, *The Farmer and Soldier* and *The Sensitive Plant*, readers encounter the other stock character of the prodigal son. These two tracts also lack exact publication dates, but their numbers, 13 and 95, seem to indicate early publication dates as well. In both of these, the authors employ central characters who, late in life, experience guilt and remorse, which lead them to repentance and conversion.

In *The Farmer and Soldier*, the prodigal son character is used to provoke the reader's introspection. In this tract, the scene is set with two young brothers sitting before the fire in their New England home. James, the younger at age thirteen, declares to his brother John his intention to be a soldier. John voices his views on soldiering as cruel rather than glorious, and he announces his preference for farming. Quickly, thirty years pass, and the older brother is sitting before the same fire, now with his wife and children, in the house that he has inherited from his dead parents. As they sit talking about James, they hear a knock at the door: "They opened it, and a man leaning upon crutches entered wearily. His garments were thin and tattered, and his countenance haggard" (7). Unsurprisingly, the visitor is James, aged and battle worn near the end of a life spent soldiering. "Brother, sister," James announces, "I have come home to you to die" (7). In the following pages, James recounts his adventures and the attendant guilt he has felt for ignoring his parents' advice against adopting the soldiering life. Like the prodigal son of the New Testament, James finds himself wallowing in sin and remorse, praying "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son" (9, citing Luke 15.18). Though his parents are long dead, John reassures his brother that they had forgiven him and prayed for his safety. In his remaining days, James counsels with the longtime family minister, prays, and studies his

Bible. A gradual change is affected in his spirit, and he prepares for his death. In his final hours, James has been transformed by the Holy Spirit, and he dies with this prayer on his lips: "Jesus, thou whose last gift was peace, take a sinner unto thee" (16).

The Sensitive Plant begins with the story of a woman and her three children who come back to live with the grandfather for unspecified reasons. The grandfather is a gardener, and he provides the narrator with a corner garden spot for him and his brother to cultivate as they see fit. A visitor promises to send the narrator special seeds: "I will send you some seeds of the sensitive plant, my child, to plant in your dear little spot" (5). The seeds arrive, are planted, and soon sprout. The sensitive plant, so named because of its response to leaf/human contact, is crushed when the cow gets into the garden. The narrator assumes his mother has damaged it, and he snaps at her, saying, "Oh, you are always hurting my sensitive plant; you sha'n't" (8). His mother is crushed by his harsh words, and "her look of sad surprise and mild rebuke pierced [his] heart" (9). Suddenly, the narrative jumps twenty years forward, and the narrator receives a letter saying that his mother is very ill. As he lies awake thinking about her, "then came vividly to [his] mind the angry, unkind words which [he] had spoken twenty years before" (10). The narrator's subsequent sorrow and repentance are sobering reminders to the reader that "sin casts long, dark shadows on all our pleasures" (12). In this tract, the stock character of the prodigal son is again employed to urge young readers to honor their fathers and mothers. As in *The Farmer and Soldier*, late-life guilt and remorse are catalysts for deathbed conversions and salvation.

This examination of ATS publications illustrates its use of a sentimental didactic formula. As Haynes has pointed out, the Society often made use of stock characters.

Whether they focused on the poor person rich in religious piety or the prodigal son, these narrative tracts were designed to move the heart of the reader to repentance. Perhaps the most pathetic of the stock sentimental devices is the deathbed scene, a convention that the ATS was quick to adopt and adapt from the novels of the early republic. Chapter two's examination of the early works of American sentimentalism will document how Brown, Rowson, and Foster used the sentimental deathbed scene in their novels. This examination, in turn, will provide a basis for comparison to the ATS tracts examined in chapter three.

CHAPTER II

“HERE LET ME FINISH MY EXISTENCE”:

THE DEATH SCENES IN THE SENTIMENTAL NOVELS OF

BROWN, FOSTER, AND ROWSON

To demonstrate more clearly the changes in American sentimentalism wrought by the ATS in the early to mid-nineteenth century, it is useful to examine one inescapable sentimental trope, the deathbed scene, in three representative novels of pre-1800 American sentimentalism: William Brown's *The Power of Sympathy* (1789), Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1791), and Hannah Foster's *The Coquette* (1797). As one of the central conventions of the genre, the death scene includes the characteristics of sentimentalism outlined above: a scene of distress, visible expressions of sympathy, a didactic or moralistic lesson, and the privileging of emotion in response to a pathetic situation. However, the death scenes in the novels of the early republic are markedly different than those of subsequent sentimental works, including both the tracts of the ATS and the mid-nineteenth-century bestsellers. One contributing factor in these alternative portrayals is the differences between the world views held by eighteenth-century and nineteenth-century white Americans, differences occasioned in part by the rise of evangelicalism in the early 1800s. Two such differences are particularly important to this discussion.

First, the citizens of the early republic had a very different view of and attitude toward death from those of nineteenth-century Americans. Death was an ever-present fact of daily existence for early Americans; the proximity of it and the frequency with which it occurred necessitated a more proactive contemplation of death than was required

of later Americans. Furthermore, the strong and distinctive religious beliefs of the early colonists shaped the way they viewed death. The second important difference was the eighteenth-century American's perspective on the idea of community. In a society that was typically rural, agrarian, and isolated, the concept of community was an especially important one.

This chapter examines the use of deathbed scenes in the novels of Brown, Foster, and Rowson in order to illustrate the ways in which early American sentimentalism reflects contemporary societal attitudes toward death, particularly the views of death as a consequence of sin and death as a separation from community. This examination will establish a basis for comparison by examining these early works which were written before evangelicalism co-opted sentimentalism and transformed both American attitudes and the genre itself. This chapter thus serves as a precursor to chapter three's investigation of the ways in which the ATS adopted and adapted the sentimental trope of the deathbed scene.

Much has been written about America's earliest novels and their death scenes, and this scholarship typically explores familiar terrain; most critics examine some aspect of the relationship between gender and politics. Those scholars that focus more heavily on the role of women examine the subtext of the early novels. This focus interprets the plots of the novels as female attempts at subversion, protest, or identification.²⁶ Of these

²⁶ For example, Patricia Spacks contends that the plots of these early novels, specifically those by female authors, express "anger at female subjection to authority" (134), while her contemporary Susan Harris (*Nineteenth Century American Women's Novels: Interpretive Strategies*, 1990) argues that the early novels present a sub-theme that subverts the works' stated intentions, exploring instead increasingly radical possibilities for their female characters. This emphasis is further evidenced by the work of Lori Merish's *Sentimental Materialism*. Merish looks specifically at Rowson's text in her examination of the ways in which females "express themselves" through consumption and "identify" with personal possessions (3). Focusing on gender in *The Coquette*, Kristie Hamilton argues that Foster explores the question of women's powerlessness in the new Republic in an attempt to expose both its effects and its causes (135).

critics that focus on the role of women, some examine the protagonists' efforts at self-determination through their efforts to control language.²⁷ Other scholars look more closely at the novels within the context of the politics of the early republic and its transitional tensions in becoming a democracy.²⁸ These critics link the sentimental novel to contemporary political thought, examining power shifts and political contests in an egalitarian society and connecting concerns about gender to the formulation of political and personal values in the new republic. Within the framework of these critical emphases, the deaths of the protagonists are usually cited as evidence of repressive patriarchal determinism, attempts at self-determination, or an expression of the vulnerabilities of the new republic. Despite continued critical interest in eighteenth-century thought and early American sentimentalism, the focus remains on politics and the plight of women in the early republic. Little attention has been given to the impact of theology on the genre despite the importance that religion played in eighteenth-century

²⁷ Dorothy Baker argues that "Eliza's struggle to control her life begins with the struggle to control language" (58). Eliza attempts to redefine key terms, specifically "freedom" and "coquette." Also focusing on Eliza's use of language, Ian Finseth contends that Eliza embodies the tensions between passionate and rational language, focusing the novel's attention on the failures of communication. Cathy Davidson posits this same failure as the central idea of Brown's *The Power of Sympathy*, arguing that the author's use of the epistolary form emphasizes this focus on language ("*The Power of Sympathy* Reconsidered" 21).

²⁸ Anne Dalke examines the "unconscious incest" plot as characteristic of anxiety regarding the new republic's "absence of a well defined social system" (188), but Gareth Evans identifies Brown, Foster, and Rowson as proponents of the nation's emerging middle class who portray the rake as "the embodiment of English and French threats to the new nation's stability and integrity" (41). Julia Stern contends that the novels should be read as political documents, ones that lament the violence of the Revolution and its reduction in individual liberties, while Elizabeth Barnes argues that Brown's novel in particular "foregrounds issues with which post-Revolutionary politics was most concerned" ("*Affecting Relations*" 597). *The Coquette's* Eliza is traditionally understood as a republican heroine because of her attempts at self-determination (Davidson, *Revolution*; Smith-Rosenberg). However, Gillian Brown interprets Eliza's story instead as a cautionary tale that typifies the undesirability of consent in American revolutionary politics ("*Consent*" 636), a position echoed by Elizabeth Dill who argues that *The Coquette* depicts the "vulnerabilities of the republic through the trials of a thirty-seven-year-old flirt" (256). Convincingly linking these same novels with political controversy, Markman Ellis explores the genre's connection to the anti-slavery movement, the utility and economics of canals, and the formation of a charity for penitent prostitutes (4). Ellis aligns himself with this school of critics when he labels these early novels as "political tool[s] of considerable cultural significance" (4).

America. This chapter attempts to expand the critical conversation by examining the impact of evolving American theology on the novels of Brown, Rowson, and Foster and, in particular, how that changing theology altered eighteenth-century views of death and community.

Throughout the seventeenth century, the New England Puritans' view of death was shaped by their Calvinistic theology. They believed strongly in the concept of the election, the belief that God had predestined a select group to receive salvation. However, this belief left them with a great deal of uncertainty regarding their own salvation. Though sure of a predestined Elect, the individual remained unsure about his or her inclusion in that Elect. Consequently, the Puritans feared death with its potential for eternal damnation. They found death "terrifying," according to historian David Stannard, who further reports that there was "frequent deathbed anxiety among the godly" (*Death in America* xii).²⁹ In the beginning decades of the eighteenth century, Calvinism and the strict Puritan ethos began to lose ground as its adherents struggled to maintain an identity in an increasingly heterogeneous and commercialized world. By the start of the Revolutionary War, religious diversity, particularly among Christian denominations, flourished in America (Finke and Stark 59), and by the end of the Revolutionary War, Calvin's idea of the Elect had been superseded by an emphasis on "'good works' or public behavior as key to salvation" (Henderson 491). This shift in focus changed attitudes toward death. Late eighteenth-century Americans often viewed death as punitive, and the deaths of sinners were seen frequently as lessons on the

²⁹ David Stannard's *The Puritan Way of Death* (1977) explores the ways in which the physical world and theology of the New England Puritans influenced their attitude toward death. Though Stannard's book met with initial criticism concerning its incomplete arguments (Frost, Levine), its use of secondary sources (Illick, Oberholzer), and its sociological framework (Carroll), the work remains a touchstone for more recent works on the Puritan worldview and American attitudes toward death.

consequences of sin (Henderson 487). Particularly, the death of a fallen woman was commonly understood to be a deserved punishment rather than a tragic loss to the community (488).

This punitive view of death was not caused by unfamiliarity with the event. Rather, death was an immediate and familiar commonplace in the lives of the early Americans. Charles Jackson contends that death was “never hidden away” because there was simply “too much of it” (7). Common causes of death included malaria, tuberculosis (consumption), cholera, measles, diphtheria, and typhoid (Coffin 16, Lerner 36). In the early years of the eighteenth century, the death rate in Boston hovered around thirty-five to forty deaths per thousand (not including infrequently reported infant deaths) with the rate climbing to one hundred per thousand in epidemic years (Stannard, *The Puritan Way* 53).³⁰ Gary Laderman, well-known for his work on American religious history and American attitudes toward death, notes that between one-fifth and one-third of all children died before age ten (24). Funeral sermons, epitaphs, and graveyard art served as constant reminders of one’s own mortality (Coffin 172), and the centralized location of burial plots within the village ensured frequent reflection on death. Between religious uncertainty and the harsh realities of daily life, it is little wonder that the early American “imagination dwelt on the dark side of death” (Halttunen 125).

Death was viewed negatively, in part, because of its connection to the Anglo-American idea of community, which originated among the seventeenth-century Puritans.³¹ The Puritans viewed themselves as a community of believers on an errand

³⁰ For the purposes of comparison and perspective, the U.S. death rate for 2005 according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was 8.26 deaths per 1000 population (*NCHS-Fastats*).

³¹ Multiple studies chronicle the lingering influence of the New England Puritans on American thinking. Perry Miller’s *Errand into the Wilderness* (1956) is the foundational work on America as a redeemer

into the wilderness. This divine errand united the community behind a common mission, the establishment of the New Jerusalem in the American wilderness. Consequently, death held great meaning for the Puritan individual, who found occasion to contemplate his or her own mortality (Stannard, *Death in America* x), as well as for the community, which used the funeral as a public forum for affirming the collective identity of the community of believers (Henderson 490). Laderman agrees that death was integrated into the life of the community (26). This sense of a united communal mission continued until the end of the 1700s when it disintegrated in the face of the nineteenth-century social and economic forces outlined in chapter one.

In the context of this lingering sense of a shared mission, death represented a final separation from the earthly community with no certainty of restoration to community in the hereafter. In his monumental volume *The Hour of Our Death*, Philippe Ariès argues that the pain of death became comparable to the sorrow of a broken friendship (300), emphasizing the separation from community created by death.³² Thus, those who gave in to sin could expect to reap their just reward: death freighted with the potential for a final separation from the community and from God. This view of sin and its consequences greatly influenced the depiction of death as portrayed in the early novels of American sentimentalism.

nation, while Sacvan Bercovitch's *American Jeremiad* (1978) is the seminal study of the Puritan's "prophet in the wilderness" sermon tradition.

³² Ariès's *The Hour of Our Death* (1981) examines the literature, art, archeology, and public records of over eight centuries to explain the silence surrounding death in the twentieth century. Though the tome's coverage ranges from the Middle Ages to the present and relies heavily on the author's investigation of French history and culture for its conclusions, much of what Ariès observes relates to all Western cultures. Interestingly, Ariès pairs his scholarly quest with a personal one: a yearning for a revival of community. He contends that the twentieth century's loss of death ritual is symptomatic of the larger loss of community. Renowned for its scope and breadth of supporting evidence, Ariès's text remains oft-cited despite its self-proclaimed status as a "meditation" rather than as an airtight example of historical and sociological scholarship.

In *The Power of Sympathy*, *Charlotte Temple*, and *The Coquette*, readers encounter death scenes that share a remarkable number of similarities. These shared characteristics make Rowson's and Foster's novels seem largely derivative of Brown's text, but Rowson and Foster did not necessarily pattern their works after Brown's. Instead, all three authors were influenced by similar societal attitudes. An examination of the three early novels will illustrate that American sentimentalism of the late eighteenth century was a genre influenced by prevailing attitudes toward death, community, and fiction, attitudes that shaped the genre in ways that render it significantly different than the version presented later in the publications of the ATS and the mid-century bestsellers.

These early novels reflect the pressure widely experienced by eighteenth-century authors to produce works that were morally uplifting. Thus, these works used the death scene for a specific purpose, as a depiction of punishment for moral transgression. Brown, Rowson, and Foster each create death scenes in which the dying character meets her untimely end because of her failure to adhere to the prevailing moral code of the eighteenth century. In each, the central female character's end affirms that, in the words of Romans 6.23, "the wages of sin is death," whether that sin be ignoring parental advice, flirting excessively with male acquaintances, or falling prey to the flattery of the libertine.

All three of these novels explore deathbed situations that share a number of common characteristics. Each novel includes a female character who has become pregnant as the result of an illicit liaison. The pregnant women are portrayed as emotionally overwhelmed by the infamy attendant upon their situation. Shame, guilt, and sorrow plague their remaining days and gradually weaken their constitutions. Brown, Rowson, and Foster develop plots that gradually isolate or alienate their tragic characters,

leaving them lost and alone, emotionally if not physically. Each character experiences both physical and emotional separation from the community of which she has been a part. In this lonely, shameful state, the dying women view death as a welcome relief, not as the admission to a heavenly reward for a virtuous life, as is depicted in later sentimental works, but as cessation of the sorrow and self-recrimination that accompanies their fallen plight. Despite these broad similarities, each author crafts a unique tale, developing different aspects of the common narrative.

The Death Scenes of *The Power of Sympathy*

In the earliest of the three novels, *The Power of Sympathy*, William Hill Brown includes deaths of numerous male and female characters. However, the author provides only two characters' deaths with sufficient detail to be considered death "scenes," those of Maria Fawcett and Ophelia Shepherd. Though these two women undergo dramatically different experiences and die in different manners, they share the common narrative trajectory of an illicit pregnancy followed by shame and an untimely death.

In Brown's epistolary novel, Maria's travails are related in the letters of Mrs. Holmes, who still "drop[s] a tear of pity at the recital of her [Maria's] misfortunes" (88). Maria is discovered by Mrs. Holmes one evening sitting on the ground and crying. Maria characterizes herself as "a stranger, without home" (89), a woman without community. Without friends or family, this young woman is cared for by the Holmes family, and though her health is grave, she rallies briefly under the kind attention shown her by a substitute community. After her physical health stabilizes temporarily, Maria relates the details of her circumstances.

The pregnant young woman reveals to her nurses that she has “always entertained a predilection for Mr. Harrington” (89). Harrington, though married to Amelia for two years, has wooed Maria with ostensibly sincere declarations of his love for her, and she has fallen prey to his charms; “He found my heart too slightly guarded—he strove—he triumphed” (89), she relates. After a pregnancy results from their illicit union, Harrington’s visits become briefer and more infrequent. Finally, after accusing her of unfaithfulness, Harrington stops his visits completely. Driven mad with a grief that renders her irrational and physically weakened, Maria leaves her home and begins to wander, driven from her community by her shame and sorrow. Her wanderings lead to her current refuge with the Holmes family.

Though Maria’s account of her situation provokes sympathy, it is Brown’s depiction of her mental state that deserves attention. Maria is overwhelmed by shame, guilt, and grief. She characterizes herself as one “whose misery bears her down to an untimely grave” (89). She repeatedly weeps throughout her story, and her health continues to decline under the pressure of extreme emotional duress. Mr. Holmes describes her as “stung with remorse and frantic with despair” (93). Later, we read that Maria’s heart is transfixed by “melancholy and guilt,” and she “sighs out her miserable existence—the prey of poverty, ignominy and reproach!” (93). Throughout Mrs. Holmes’s letters chronicling Maria’s demise, the author emphasizes the traumatic emotions that are experienced by this wayward character. Brown portrays Maria in a way that is consistent with the eighteenth-century understanding of and attitude toward sin and death. She is plagued with a sense of guilt for her transgression, and her mental

anguish serves as a reminder to the reader of the torturous consequences of sin. Maria's emotional trauma is heightened by her understanding of herself as alienated and alone.

Having already introduced herself as "a stranger, without home—without friends" (89), Maria continues, throughout the brief remainder of her life, to view herself as isolated. Her journey that ends with the Holmes family begins with her realization of Harrington's "affection being estranged" from her (90). In a letter that she later writes to her seducer, she underscores her alienation from her relatives by characterizing herself as "the sorrow and disgrace of my family" (90). As before, it is the words of Mr. Holmes that best capture Maria's lonely condition when he concludes that she is "lost to the world, to her friends, and to herself" (93). This same character notes, concerning Maria's grave, that "the friends of her youth shun even the spot which conceals her relics" (93). This characteristic alienation is depicted as the natural consequence of illicit behavior. Whether self-imposed or imposed by others, this physical, emotional, or spiritual isolation from community is responsible for the lonely woman's apparently welcoming attitude toward death.

In her last days, Maria repeatedly looks forward to her impending demise. When she first meets Mrs. Holmes, she describes her life as burdensome and tells her new friend that if God were to call her to the spirit world, she would "gladly obey the summons and rejoice in the stroke which bade me depart from sorrow and the world" (89). Maria admits that she looks forward to death with "trembling expectation" (90). She questions why she should linger on earth in her miserable existence and why she should not "welcome the hand of death" (90). Thinking of the shame she has brought her mother, Maria believes that only death "shall expiate the crime of [her] daughter" (90).

Her attitude does not escape the notice of the Holmes family. Mr. Holmes observes that “she blesses the approach of death in whatever shape he may appear” (93), and Maria’s final minutes take on a tone of resignation.

Mrs. Holmes’s letter offers a detailed account of Maria’s last moments as “serene and composed” (97). Maria exhorts Mrs. Holmes to “Weep not for me Death has nothing shocking to me—I have familiarized myself to his terrors” (97). Though she is hopeful of being shown mercy in the afterlife, Maria primarily views death as “freeing me from a world which has lost its relish” (97). With a peaceful “smile of resignation,” Maria offers her last words before sinking onto her pillow in death: “I welcome death as the angel of peace” (97).

Though Maria contemplates the afterlife, it is in a manner altogether different than the contemplations depicted in the works of the ATS (discussed in chapter three) and later sentimental bestsellers by Stowe, Warner, and Cummins (discussed in chapter four). In this early novel, Maria Fawcet questions whether her repentance will be sufficient to appease God, a clear reflection of the eighteenth-century uncertainty regarding salvation. Despite this uncertainty, Maria anxiously anticipates death as the end to her earthly travails. Brown’s portrayal frames Maria’s death in eighteenth-century terms. She reflects the period’s uncertainty and fear concerning the afterlife; nevertheless, her understanding of death as the natural consequence of sin allows her to embrace it as a preferred alternative to a continued existence of shame and isolation.

Elsewhere in Brown’s novel, Ophelia Shepherd shares Maria’s attitude toward death, but Ophelia’s shame and guilt lead her to hasten her end by committing suicide. One of the novel’s letters written by Harriot Fawcet, Maria’s illegitimate child, details

Ophelia's circumstances as discovered by Harriot during a visit to the home of Mr. and Mrs. Martin. Ophelia was Mr. Martin's wife's sister, but "he had conceived a passion for Ophelia and was plotting to gratify it" (62). Martin offered lodging to Ophelia, and her acceptance led to his ultimate triumph "over her innocence and virtue" (62). Their "incestuous connection" remained active until Ophelia, in an act of isolation, moved into the country to give birth to "at once the son and nephew of Martin" (62). This development led to Ophelia's estrangement from both her father, Mr. Shepherd, and her lover, Mr. Martin.

Ophelia contemplates the "gloomy prospect of a blasted reputation" (62). She is "penetrated with a melancholy sense of her misconduct" (63), and she becomes intent on "the manner of her death" (64). As in Maria's case, Ophelia is consumed by the dire consequences of her situation and the alienation she experiences at the hands of those she loves most; her father expresses great resentment and "unquenchable fury," and Martin's affection changes to "the vilest hatred" (62). Harriot depicts Ophelia as "doomed to suffer the blackest ingratitude from her seducer on the one hand and to experience the severity of paternal vengeance on the other" (62). She has no one to whom she can turn; her alienation is far more pronounced than that of Maria, whose surrogate community provides her with relative peace.

Ophelia's hopes of a quiet life of isolated seclusion are dashed by her father's demand that a meeting take place between himself, his daughter, and her seducer. As the time nears for the meeting, Ophelia grows increasingly distressed. Harriot's letter reports that Ophelia's conduct "bordered upon insanity" (64). Her anguish about the meeting underscores the impossibility of being restored to community after such a public

transgression. To avoid the confrontation between her father and Martin, Ophelia takes her own life. As she dies, she cries to her mother and to heaven, "Let my crime be forgotten with my name" (64). Once again, Brown crafts a female character whose illicit pregnancy overwhelms her with shame, guilt, and sorrow, and she is alienated from her community of friends and family as a consequence of her liaison. As with Maria, Ophelia anticipates death as a relief from the horrors of daily life.

Brown makes Ophelia's beliefs about death more explicit in the writings that are discovered after her death. Though aware of the horrible nature of the suicide she was about to commit, Ophelia eagerly anticipated her death: "Her miserable life was insupportable; there was no oblation but in death" (65). Like Maria, Ophelia contemplates the afterlife, hoping that God will exercise mercy in return for her repentance. But with disregard for the eternal consequences of suicide, Ophelia kills herself in the face of earthly pressures that she finds greater than heavenly uncertainty: "She welcomed death, therefore, as the pleasing harbinger of relief to the unfortunate" (65). In Brown's novel, both Maria and Ophelia share the characteristics of early American sentimentalism's death scenes.

Both women face their untimely deaths as a relief from the problems of this world. Chief among these problems is the separation from community that these women experience as a consequence of their sins. Maria flees her home and family to live out her final days among strangers, while Ophelia retires to a solitary existence in the countryside before choosing the ultimate separation of suicide. Brown formulates death scenes in which the dying character has already begun to experience the loss of community that is achieved with finality in death. Furthermore, Brown heightens this

sense of isolation by filtering accounts of the two women through third party letters. Both women feel uncertainty about the afterlife, but both embrace death as a natural consequence of their sins and spiritual shortcomings. These portrayals illustrate the influence of the contemporary American attitude toward death on the characters' creator. This same treatment of death exists in Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*, published just two years later; however, Rowson's portrayal further emphasizes the alienation of the central female character.

The Death Scene of *Charlotte Temple*

Rowson's Charlotte, like her predecessors in Brown's novel, is seduced and impregnated. Montraville, a dashing young military officer, sees Charlotte at a distance in their native England just before he is to set sail for America and becomes enamored with her. Charlotte, under the influence of her teacher Mademoiselle La Rue, allows herself to be wooed by Montraville's persuasive tongue, and she is carried away to America. Here, Montraville places Charlotte in a rural cottage where she lives pregnant and alone under the care of the dastardly Belcour, Montraville's fellow officer. Although Belcour is interested in establishing with Charlotte a liaison of his own, she rebuffs him with a heart full of sorrow and shame over her situation.

Charlotte's sense of guilt begins to take its toll on her health and appearance. Rowson notes, "Real anguish of heart had in a great measure faded her charms; her cheeks were pale from want of rest, and her eyes, by frequent, indeed almost continued weeping, were sunk and heavy" (134). She is much given to "melancholy reflections" (134), and her days are filled with gloom and sorrow. Exhibiting the same sort of emotional and physical distress as both Brown's Maria and Ophelia, Charlotte becomes

further alienated from those she loves. Belcour conspires to keep her repentant letters from the hands of both her father and Montraville, either of which, readers are led to believe, would have flown to her side if he had received such a missive. Though this inference departs from the plot line established by Brown, the consequences for Charlotte do not differ. In fact, this plot development seems to signify that alienation from community is an unavoidable consequence of sin. Because of Belcour's manipulations, Charlotte's physical isolation in the countryside expands into a mental isolation as well. After one of his visits, Charlotte laments, "Here let me spend my few remaining days in obscurity, unknown and unpitied: here let me die unlamented, and my name sink to oblivion" (135-136). In one of his final visits, Belcour brings the news that Montraville has become engaged. Still intent on an illicit relationship with the abandoned woman, Belcour is disgusted by Charlotte's "pale, emaciated appearance," an appearance produced by Montraville's betrayal (137). After Belcour leaves Charlotte "to sink unnoticed to the grave, a prey to sickness, grief, and penury," her alienation and isolation are complete even though further misfortunes await her (138).

Under the burden of her loneliness and sorrow, Charlotte begins to anxiously anticipate death as a welcomed relief from her earthly struggles, an anticipation that is characteristic of these early sentimental works. The narrator opines, "Never did any human being wish for death with greater fervency or with juster cause" (142). Unlike Ophelia, however, Charlotte is too keenly aware of the afterlife to terminate her own existence. After her health briefly rallies, she is evicted and turned out into the winter snows, pregnant and penniless. Charlotte's shame reaches its zenith in response to the

comments of her former landlady: "Do you think I will give away my property to a nasty impudent hussy to maintain her and her bastard" (144)?

Alone and on the streets, Charlotte makes her way to the New York home of Mademoiselle La Rue, now married as Mrs. Crayton. Charlotte begs Crayton for help but is rebuffed. With nowhere else to turn, Charlotte swoons and, lifting her eyes to heaven, exclaims, "Father of mercy, here let me finish my existence" (151). Again, the pattern emerges. Loss of virtue is followed by shame and guilt, which lead to isolation and alienation from the community.

Charlotte is taken in by one of Crayton's poor servants and his family. Though they have little room and no money, they make a place for the dying woman. Here, Charlotte gives birth to a daughter, and despite a brief rally in health, she quickly edges toward death. Charlotte reveals characteristic uncertainty about the afterlife, though not to the same degree as Maria or Ophelia; she expresses a hope that her "unfeigned repentance" will have "blotted my offences from the sight of my offended maker" (157). She confides to the clergyman that her treatment of her parents burdens her most. In the minutes preceding Charlotte's death, her father arrives from England in search of his "poor, ruined, but repentant child" (157). He embraces the delirious Charlotte and his new granddaughter and offers his forgiveness of her errors. At her death, Charlotte is described as "serenely composed" (158).

Just like Brown's characters, Rowson's Charlotte dies quietly, without outward display. Rowson, like Brown before her, creates a character whose untimely demise occurs as the result of her wayward life. However, Rowson's tale emphasizes the loss of community in ways that are more dramatic than those in Brown's portrayal. In *Charlotte*

Temple, death comes as a result of disobedience to parents. Forces work to keep Charlotte in isolation, and her father's return at the end only serves to heighten the tragic effect of her early death and her alienation from the community.

The Death Scene of *The Coquette*

Hannah Foster's *The Coquette* differs in its depiction of the death scene from the novels of Brown and Rowson, as it offers the reader a more detailed picture of the protagonist's resignation in the face of death. Foster's work is loosely based on actual events in the life of Elizabeth Whitman, the daughter of a Massachusetts minister who gave birth to a stillborn child and then died in a Danvers, Massachusetts tavern in 1788. Foster's story focuses on Eliza Wharton, whose greatest flaw is that she is a coquette, a shameless flirt. She ultimately follows the same path as Maria Fawcett, Ophelia Shepherd, and Charlotte Temple when she falls prey to Peter Sanford, the libertine. Eliza winds up pregnant by a married man, deserted, and ultimately dead.

Eliza lives with her mother on a rural estate. Here she entertains a wide community of female friends and a number of gentlemen, including a clergyman, the Rev. Mr. Boyer, and a military officer, Major Peter Sanford. Though Boyer desires her hand in marriage, Eliza prefers the dashing good looks and trappings of wealth possessed by Sanford. Through a series of improper encounters with Sanford, Eliza alienates Boyer's affections, thus isolating herself from the "right" kind of community. Foster's tale is different in its portrayal of different types of community, creating a story in which the protagonist's downfall is the result of choosing the "wrong" kind of community. This isolation clears the path for Sanford's advances; however, he has no interest in marriage since Eliza's lack of fortune makes her an unattractive match, and he ultimately marries

the wealthy Nancy. In the course of the novel, Eliza begins an illicit sexual relationship with Sanford, despite his marriage. Eventually, Sanford reports in a letter to his friend Charles Deighton that Eliza has become pregnant: “an unlucky, but not a miraculous accident, has taken place, which must soon expose our amour” (140). This development sets into motion, with some variation, the pattern of the deathbed scene established by the other two novels; the pregnancy’s effects on Eliza are immediate and traumatic.

Sanford observes that upon discovery of her pregnancy, “absolute distraction seized the soul of Eliza, which has since terminated in a fixed melancholy” (140). Her health immediately begins to weaken, and her decline is rapid. Sanford is startled by her “emaciated form” (140). The shame, guilt, and sorrow felt by Eliza echo that felt by the women in the other two novels. Her view of herself is apparent as she refers to Sanford as “the man who has robbed me of my peace; who has triumphed in my destruction; and who will cause my sun to sit [sic] at noon” (142). Eliza is acutely aware of her deteriorating condition as evidenced by her allusions to her “decaying frame,” “faded cheek,” and “tottering limbs” (142), all physical reminders that “the wages of sin is death.”

It is this awareness of her situation that drives Eliza further into despair and isolation, though likely the words of her friend and confidante, Julia Granby, influenced her as well: “I shudder . . . at your confession! Wretched, deluded girl! Is this a return for your parent’s love, and assiduous care; for your friends’ solicitude, and premonitory advice?” (142) After this speech, it is little wonder that Eliza, in a manner even more emphatic than that of her predecessors, expresses her readiness to die:

Grief has undermined my constitution. My health has fallen a sacrifice to a disordered mind. But I regret not its departure! I have not a single wish to live. Nothing which the world affords can restore my former serenity and happiness.

(146)

Driven by her own self-loathing and by the chastisement of her friend, Eliza arranges to leave at night for a remote inn, whose location she refuses to reveal, where she gives birth to a stillborn child and then dies in complete isolation.

The information that surfaces after Eliza's death completes the picture of Foster's female protagonist as typical of the early works of American sentimentalism. A newspaper article about her situation describes her "dejected state of mind" (162). One of her last letters pleads with the reader to "bury my crimes in the grave with me" (156). Her friend Julia rhetorically wonders at Eliza's course of action, "of becoming a fugitive; of deserting her mother's house and protection, and of wandering and dying among strangers" (162), i.e., of separating from her community. Surely this course of action seems less curious to readers of Brown's and Rowson's fiction than it did to Julia. This pattern of guilt and shame followed by isolation and alienation is a convention of these early works, and Foster's inclusion of the newspaper account further emphasizes the alienation that Eliza experiences, objectifying her death as a news item. As with Maria, Ophelia, and Charlotte, Eliza welcomes the end. Her brother's visit to the inn after her death reveals the "serenity and composure, with which she bid a last adieu to the world" as evidenced by "several scraps of her writing" (162). Once again, the protagonist meets her end with a reserved demeanor.

Throughout the three novels of early American sentimentalism, this type of death scene is repeated. Women are subjected to the most shameful fate imaginable to an eighteenth-century audience, an illicit pregnancy. The women's shame, guilt, and self-recrimination lead them to an advanced state of physical, spiritual, and emotional isolation and alienation from respectable society and from those that they love.³³ These overwhelming emotions and the desperate nature of their similar situations persuade them to view death as an attractive alternative. Despite their uncertainty about their destination in the afterlife, they embrace the end as a relief from the trials of their earthly lives. Uniformly, these women are viewed by fellow characters and by readers as objects of pity from whose lives much can be learned of value.

Similarities among the death scenes in these early novels include the view of death as a consequence of sin, alienation from community, and a resignation toward death. The early narratives by Foster and Brown distance readers from the death scene, filtering it through a third party in letters or newspaper accounts. This remove is consistent with the eighteenth-century view of the sin and shame attendant upon the woman's condition. To emphasize the young woman's alienation from community, the authors separate the reader from the death scene. Though Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* takes the reader to Charlotte's bedside, the death portrayal is consonant with the

³³ The fates of the principle male seducers in the three novels, though negative, lack the severity and awesome finality of those experienced by the women in the texts. In Brown's work, Ophelia's seducer/brother-in-law exchanges accusations of murder with the dead girl's father before fading from the text seemingly unpunished. Harrington deals ultimately with the death of his daughter and the suicide of his son occasioned by his own youthful dissipation. These two deaths cause him overwhelming "shame and sorrow" (128). In Rowson's novel, Belcour meets his demise on the sword of an impetuous Montraville, after the latter discovers Charlotte's treatment by the former. Montraville retains the affections of his wife Julia, but he is "subject to severe fits of melancholy" throughout the remainder of his life (161). Foster's tale reveals that Sanford faces poverty and disgrace after the death of Eliza when his wife leaves him to return to her parents and when his estate, "long mortgaged, is taken from him" (163). The more lenient authorial treatment of the seducers seems to reflect the long-standing double standard over sexual promiscuity.

contemporary views of death and community in other ways. The alienation and isolation experienced by these women figure significantly in eighteenth-century portrayals as they reflect the fear with which many citizens of the early republic faced death and its resultant loss of community.

In the next chapter, I will explore the ways in which evangelicalism began to modify nineteenth-century views of death and community. After 1800, the early American worldview rapidly lost its hold over the American imagination. Instead, an evangelical romanticization of death paved the way for the emergence of “the beautiful death,” the joy-filled final moments of the true believer. In the face of growing social and economic upheaval, the ATS adopted the sentimental trope of the death scene and romanticized it. The newly evangelicalized death scene promised the restoration of community, an attitude of expectant serenity, and a heavenly reward as incentives to conversion. It is this same desire for a restoration of community that propelled the rural cemetery movement and the nineteenth-century conception of the heavenly world of the dead. Chapter three examines the deathbed scenes in the ATS tracts to further explain the modifying effects of evangelicalism on American sentimentalism and to illustrate the Society’s potential influence on the later sentimental bestsellers of the mid-nineteenth century.

CHAPTER III

“GLORY TO THE LORD! HALLELUJAH!”:

THE DEATH SCENES IN THE TRACTS OF THE ATS

In this chapter, I explore the ways in which the ATS adopted and adapted sentimentalism. Though the American novelists of the 1790s incorporated sentimental tropes into their plots, the ATS radically altered American sentimentalism by blending these tropes, specifically the deathbed scene, with evangelicalism in a response to changing American views on death and community. The scenes in the early novels portrayed the Calvinist-influenced view of death as a negative event that promised eternal separation from community and that served as a deserved punishment for sin; however, the ATS revisioned these scenes to characterize death as a reward for living a godly life and as an opportunity for the restoration of community in eternity. It is this evangelicalized version of sentimentalism that appears in the mid-nineteenth-century bestsellers of Stowe, Warner, and Cummins.

The deathbed scene characteristic of this evangelicalized sentimentalism has been recognized by critics as one of “the founding tropes of sentimentalism” (Sanchez-Eppler, “Then When” 66). However, the scholarship has been slower to recognize the significant role played by the ATS in what Lewis Saum calls “the emergence of a generic format” of death scenes by the mid-nineteenth century (“Death” 79). In this chapter, I examine the ways in which American attitudes toward death and community evolved in response to societal changes and how the ATS addressed these changes in its tracts. Through an examination of five representative ATS tracts, I further explore the impact of evangelicalism on American sentimentalism in the early decades of the nineteenth

century and the role played by the ATS in the development of an evangelicalized deathbed scene that, by the 1850s, had become the central sentimental convention.

Changes in the American Perspective

Dynamic economic and social changes at the beginning of the nineteenth century lessened the influence of Calvinism and disrupted the sense of community experienced by most white Americans. Evangelicals responded to this upheaval by promoting a view of death that reframed the event as a deliverance and a reward and characterized heaven as a home offering an eternal restoration of community.

Throughout the eighteenth century, Anglo-Americans enjoyed a strong sense of community, and Calvinism exerted a continued influence on the American view of death. Though relative stability pervaded the eighteenth century, the early decades of the nineteenth century were characterized by upheaval, as increased transportation and production methods led to increases in industrialization and urbanization. This increased urbanization contributed in turn to an already high death rate, and the child mortality rate gradually increased throughout the 1830s and 1840s to 216.8 infant deaths per 1000 live births in the 1850s before leveling off and then finally declining in the 1870s (Haines, par. 5). These changes contributed to a societal volatility that greatly lessened the influence of Calvinism and decreased the sense of community enjoyed by most white Americans. Rural farm communities lost cohesion as their members moved to the growing urban areas and as more frequent interaction with outsiders eliminated the insular existence of their residents. These changes also necessitated the development of new ways for dealing with death. Correspondingly, the American view of death began to evolve away from an interpretation of death as divine judgment upon the wicked and as a

loss of community. According to Karen Halttunen, death lost its communal significance and the funeral service lost its public function as the community became increasingly fragmented (146). Instead, nineteenth-century thought embraced an evangelicalized emphasis on death as a reward for the virtuous and as an eternal restoration of community.

This evangelical view of death manifested itself in a number of changed perspectives. Gone was the eighteenth century's narrow focus on death as an expression of divine judgment, the potential for an eternal loss of community, and the fearful avoidance of an untimely demise. Death in the nineteenth century lost much of its terrifying aspect and its central role in the community, and for some death ideally became something to be peacefully anticipated. The devout Christian was encouraged to reframe death as an escape and even as a reward. Both David Stannard and Karen Halttunen have noted this shift in perspective on death as a deliverance from the trials of this world, marking a return to the attitude outlined by both Old and New Testament authors.³⁴ Other scholars identify this deliverance as an escape from temptation (Lerner 139), hostility (Saum, "Death" 86), and the world's sadness (Jackson 61). Regardless of their motivation, believers were encouraged to peacefully anticipate death. For evangelicals, death was regarded ideally as a blessing, an experience to be anticipated as a time of joy, hope, and promise (Lerner 139, Halttunen 125, Laderman 60).

This sentimental revisioning of death likely functioned, in part, as an attempt to restore community, in the face of social and economic upheaval, by offering the promise of eternal reunion. One interesting outgrowth of this attempt was the rural cemetery

³⁴ For Old Testament antecedents on the idea of divine deliverance, see Psalms 23:4, 116:15, 55, Proverbs 14:32, and Isaiah 57:1-2. New Testament passages conveying similar sentiments include I Corinthians 15:53-54, Philippians 1:21, Galatians 1:1-5, and Revelation 14:13.

movement. Well-documented by Stanley French in his essay "The Cemetery as Cultural Institution," the rural cemetery movement relocated graves from their position in urban, overcrowded, "stinking quagmires" (74) to a pastoral, rural setting designed to facilitate meditation, reverence, and communion with the dead and to evoke the perception of organized communities of the deceased. Ann Douglas notes that the cemeteries even began to be referenced in domestic terms such as "a vast and exquisitely beautiful dormitory" since the newly designed burial grounds were intended to "fulfill the same kind of sanctuary function" as the home ("Heaven" 61).³⁵

Even more relevant to this project is the characterization of heaven as "home," another expression of the desire to restore the lost sense of community.³⁶ Though Christians have long been characterized as pilgrims longing for home (Covey 15), the nineteenth century's climate of dramatic change led to renewed emphasis on this characterization, a clear example of doctrinal emphases mirroring felt needs. Sara Quay posits that nineteenth-century culture was shaped by both a literal and figurative longing for home (39). And, with heaven characterized as home, Christians were able to anticipate a continuation of the domestic sphere at death (Ariès, *The Hour* 611; Douglas, "Heaven" 55). This perspective on death evidences a search for continuity that Charles Corr has identified as a persistent trait in modern children's literature about death (369). Indeed, Halttunen notes that, for Christians, not even death could break the bonds of

³⁵ Both Stannard (*Death* xii) and Halttunen (127) agree that the rural cemetery movement was an expression of the sentimental view of death.

³⁶ The Christian characterization of heaven as "home" stems from biblical language in both the Old Testament (Ecclesiastes 12:5) and New Testament (Philippians 3:20, II Peter 3:13). Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* is among the most influential of later works that continue the characterization of the Christian as a pilgrim on a journey homeward. A more recent example is the 1946 gospel hymn "This World is Not My Home" written by J.R. Baxter of the Stamps-Baxter Music and Printing Company. With the chorus "Oh, Lord, you know I have no friend like you. / If heaven's not my home, then Lord what will I do? / The angels beckon me from heaven's open door, / And I can't feel at home in this world anymore," it seems fitting that this hymn was first offered to the public in a collection entitled *Sentimental Songs* (1946).

domestic love (130), as the departed family member acted as a guardian angel maintaining an influence over the hearts of the mourners. Thus, the traditional Christian view of heaven dovetailed with the nineteenth century's newly romanticized view of death and the desire for restoration of lost community. Though life on earth was difficult, viewing heaven as home provided the ongoing encouragement of an eternal reunion. As Ann Douglas observes, the earth was an orphanage and heaven was home ("Heaven" 67).

A Comparison of the Death Scenes of the ATS and the Early Novels

The ATS appropriated sentimentalism's use of the deathbed scene for its own end, the evangelization of the masses. Gary Laderman characterizes the motif of the Christian death as "a powerful evangelical device" used as a "suasive tool" by evangelicals in general (23). Despite the Society's divergent purpose from that of the pre-1800 novels, the deathbed scenes of the tracts in many ways resemble the death scenes of these novels. Dozens of tracts from the 1830's and 1840's include dying characters who, like Maria Fawcett, Ophelia Shepherd, Charlotte Temple, and Eliza Wharton, eagerly anticipate their demise. In both the early novels and the tracts, the dying victim tends to be female, and in both the dying character is depicted as an object of instruction. Titles like *Catharine Helfenstein*, *Eliza Thornton*, *The Springfield-Cottage Girl*, *Little Ann*, and *Margaret* illustrate the ATS's use of an emotionally charged deathbed scene in its publications.

However, despite these similarities, the deathbed scenes of the early novels and those of the ATS publications in fact differ significantly. One important difference is that the dying characters of the tracts tend to be younger than the dying women of the early novels. While the females of the early novels are of child-bearing age, the children of the

ATS tracts tend to be twelve or under and are thus prepubescent and isolated from the potential for illicit pregnancy.³⁷

Though four of the five tracts examined in this chapter coincidentally feature protagonists who die at age twelve, the dying character in *Little Ann* is eleven, and other ATS publications such as *Little George* feature dying children as young as age six. In *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman*, Catherine Robson contends that the Victorians thought of early childhood as a feminine era, lived out in the protective environment of the nursery. Though Robson's focus is on British male authors, her argument renders the ATS's occasional inclusion of a young dying male less of an anomaly.³⁸ Despite their young ages, these children have maturity and wisdom beyond their years, attributes of the *puer senex*, or the "child with an adult's wisdom" as noted by literary historian Laurence Lerner (86). Lerner traces this idea of the wise child to the New Testament and its example of Jesus "being about [his] Father's business" in Luke 2.43-49 (87), though the *puer senex* was identified by Ernst Robert Curtius in 1953 as "a coinage of late pagan Antiquity" with biblical correspondences (99). The ATS used the *puer senex* for two primary instructional purposes: to illustrate the most desirable condition of the soul and to remind readers of the unexpected nature of death.

³⁷ *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (1963) is another benchmark scholarly effort by Philippe Ariès, who argues that a "discovery of childhood" occurred between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, a discovery that separated children from adult society and limited their freedom among adults. Though it possesses some of the same shortcomings as *The Hour of Our Death*, *Centuries of Childhood* remains a touchstone for research into the evolution of our understanding of childhood.

³⁸ An area for continued scholarship involves a study of the evolving understanding of children and childhood in nineteenth-century America. Building on the work of Philippe Ariès and Catherine Robson, Karen Sanchez-Eppler's *Dependent States: The Child's Part in Nineteenth-Century American Culture* (2002) examines the role of children in American culture between 1820 and 1880. Sanchez-Eppler's focus on the works of Nathaniel Hawthorne and Harriet Wilson is complemented by an examination of temperance literature, photographs, and missionary tracts. The rich body of ATS publications would quite possibly yield an interesting picture of evolving portrayals of childhood if examined in a systematic manner. Related to this is the issue of gender, and an exploration of the Society's portrayals of boys in its publications could also be very informative.

Ann Douglas recognizes the use of the child victim as an opportunity to illustrate the New Testament's "last shall be first" philosophy of Matthew 20.16 ("Home" 57), a philosophy evidenced in the biblical pattern of overturned expectations that is pervasive throughout the Old and New Testaments. However, the ATS's focus on "the least of these" (Matt. 25.40) seems to more nearly reflect Jesus's teachings regarding the hearts of his followers in Matthew 18.3, a passage referenced by numerous ATS tracts. Jesus says, "Verily I say unto you, except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." The children depicted by the ATS embrace death with an innocence of heart that assures their acceptance into heaven. These dying children serve as a recurring reminder to the tracts' readers of the need for childlike innocence, devotion, and wisdom, a dramatic departure from the early novels' implied warning that "the wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6.23). Catherine Robson contends that texts urging the reader to "become like little children" were about the children's innocence, rather than their obedience (7). While the sentimental novels of the late eighteenth century focus on death as a punishment for violating the moral code, the tracts position the death of young innocents as a lesson in the ideal way one ought to be prepared to meet his or her maker.

The ATS's deathbed scenes also remind readers of the unexpected nature of death. While the tracts teach their readers that childlike innocence is the ideal condition for the soul, they also warn readers that death does not just come for the old or the immoral. Each of these characters is cut down in the bloom of youth. Lewis Saum identifies this sentiment as reflective of the "be ye also ready" message of Matthew 25 (*Popular* 18). The bridegroom metaphor used by Jesus in this parable encourages a state

of continual preparedness as exhibited by the story's five wise virgins. Just as these five women await the bridegroom's unannounced arrival, so should the Christian be in a state of constant anticipation of Christ's return or God's summons: "Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour" (Matt. 25.13).³⁹ The repeated use of juvenile deathbed scenes ensured that the readers would constantly have before them a sentimental reminder that, when it comes to death, God is "no respecter of persons" (Acts 10.34).

Another significant difference between the dying victims of the early novels and of the tracts is the sin and guilt associated with the secular characters. Where the dead in the earlier novels are representative of the basest female condition, the ATS's characters are often the epitome of youthful innocence. Though the ATS did produce tracts that illustrated the deaths of "sinners" suffering the consequences of drinking, swearing, gambling, or not observing the Sabbath, most of the tract deaths occur in children between the ages of ten and twelve, and they occur only after an initial period of promising Bible scholarship and testimony in which the central character has lived a life of Biblical study and Christian service. Though both the tracts and the early novels contain a confessional passage in which the dying protagonist admits her sinful nature, the tracts continue with a profession of confidence in Jesus and his power to save that is absent in the early texts. His or her love of God makes the end not the scene of gloom and despair found in earlier works but rather a scene of joy and light that accompanies the homecoming of a weary Christian pilgrim.

³⁹ Gary Laderman regards this "keen, deep-rooted awareness that death could strike at any moment" as an impetus for revivalism in the first half of the nineteenth century (57). For a full discussion, see Laderman's *The Sacred Remains: American Attitudes Toward Death, 1799-1883* (1996).

This attitude of joy is distinctly different from the attitude conveyed in the early novels. Often, the tracts' deathbed scenes use words like "happy" and "joyful." Gregory Schneider reports that "happy" referred to an "ecstatic state" that came from "having a sense of constant communion with God" (357), and Lewis Saum notes that when an adjective like "happy" is used in these scenes, it typically indicates a condition of spiritual readiness for the kingdom of heaven ("Death" 84). Margaret Coffin supports this observation with the citation of a typical tombstone epitaph: "Harriet Miles / Fell asleep in Jesus / January 16, 1857 / Aged 15 years. / Her last word was HAPPY" (183). For the ATS's dying children, a spiritual transformation is taking place as they prepare to enter the heavenly realms. Oftentimes, the tract writers refer to the "great change" that these happy children experience. Their happiness stems from their confidence in their eternal destination and in the divine providence of God, a confidence starkly different from the uncertainty of the young women of the early novels. Those novels depict an untimely death attended by guilt, sorrow, melancholy and despair; whereas, the tracts take great care to describe the joy and excitement surrounding the imminent deaths. Like the women of the early novels, the children repeatedly express a preference for death. However, unlike the fallen women, the ATS characters express a cheerful desire, interpreting death not as an escape but as a homecoming, a chance to finally be with God and their savior.

Yet another difference between the early novels and the tracts is the placement of the reader in the deathbed scenes. While the eighteenth-century novels of the early republic isolate the dying characters, relating the details of the death scene through an intermediary, the ATS tracts of the early to mid-nineteenth century move the reader into

the deathroom to sit bedside with the patient's circle of family and friends. Regina Barreca notes that death constitutes one of the few instances in which the reader is allowed to enter the Victorian bedroom (5), an observation about British literature that can be extended to nineteenth-century American literature as well. This proximity further emphasizes the desirability of the protagonist's circumstances as he or she continues to enjoy a sense of community up until the moment at which he or she is transported to the homecoming reunion with God through death. Schneider argues that those gathered at the bedside experience a "community of intense feeling" (362). The isolation and alienation experienced by the women at their deaths in the early works is modified to reflect the loving community of friends, family, and reader who gather to bid farewell to those who "die in the Lord" (Rev. 14.13).

Not only did the ATS revise elements of the traditional deathbed scene, but also it incorporated new elements that are a direct reflection of the evangelical influence. In addition to completely revisioning the central character of these scenes, the ATS included an exhortation by the dying victim. Invariably, the tracts' protagonists vocalize the ATS message in an exhortation of various members of the community that attends them at their death. Whether it be classmates, siblings, parents, servants, or future generations, the recipients of the sermon are exhorted to be mindful of their own spiritual conditions. This spiritual exhortation is typically accompanied by the expressed desire for the restoration of the community in the hereafter. One of the key motivations of the exhortation is so that the dying child will ultimately be reunited in heaven with those she holds dear. Only by following her example of childish innocence and submission to

God's will, in short by "becoming as little children," will her hearers follow her to heaven, a heaven that Diana Pasulka describes as a "community of saintly children" (62).

Two other added elements, the inclusion of hymns and of scriptural language, reflect the influence of evangelical thought on the genre's central trope. In the tracts' deathbed scenes, there are frequent references to hymn singing as a form of encouragement. Regularly, the dying children or their attendants voice lines from hymns to express joy or comfort, a practice completely absent from the scenes in the early novels. In quoting these lines, the authors draw on a great musical heritage that was quite familiar to the ATS's evangelical audience. Indeed, these allusions to hymn singing or specific songs occur in all of the tracts examined in this project.⁴⁰ In addition to the hymn references, the tracts include scriptural language. Though the early novels do convey a moral judgment, they do it without the use of scriptural language found throughout the tracts. The tracts' characters regularly quote or paraphrase scripture in their conversations, a reflection of their hearts' true condition: "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come forth from the heart" (Matt. 15.18).

The Death Scenes of the ATS Tracts

Historical records indicate that there are potentially hundreds of ATS tracts that include deathbed scenes. The plot summaries available in an annotated ATS publications

⁴⁰ Among those hymns most frequently quoted in the tracts are those written by Isaac Watts (1674-1748), an English pastor and writer. Considered the father of English hymnology, Watts composed over six hundred hymns. In an 1833 article, Samuel Willard says the following of Watts and his body of work:

He takes easy precedence of other hymn-writers, and should, as indeed he does, occupy the widest space in every collection. The power of Watts's name, founded on the character of his Psalms and Hymns, is perhaps as great as the power of any name on earth. . . . These lays are sung . . . , not by one denomination of Christians, but by all, and not only by the poor and unlettered, but by the rich, the polished, and the learned. (168-169)

Watts's collection entitled *Hymns and Spiritual Songs in Three Books* (1773) has proved to be an invaluable resource for identifying the hymn excerpts that appear in the ATS's tracts and in the later bestsellers. Hymns from this collection are typically identified by the book number, followed by a period and the hymn number.

list printed in 1849 evidence the prevalence of this motif among the Society's many works. The five tracts that I have chosen for close study are representative of these deathbed narratives, and I have necessarily limited my focus to a representative sampling for a variety of reasons.⁴¹ As a result, I will examine three tracts clearly published before 1850: *Eliza Thornton* (1823), *Little Ann* (1828), and *Catharine Helfenstein* (c. 1831). Additionally, I will examine two other tracts, *The Springfield Cottage-Girl* and *Margaret*, that bear the low ATS numbers indicative of early publication, but for which I have been unable to ascertain definitive publication dates. The following examination reveals the characteristics of deathbed scenes developed by the ATS and later adopted by the authors of the mid-century bestsellers.

Tract number 31, *Eliza Thornton*, chronicles events set in 1817 and is referenced in the Society's ninth report of 1823 as a "new tract" ("Proceedings" 106). In this early tract, readers encounter the trope of the wise child and witness the impact of one deathbed scene on another. This text relates the story of a young girl who lives with her father and stepmother. Her "poor but pious" father (5) and her stepmother both talk to Eliza about the condition of her soul and try to convince her of her need for a savior. Though Eliza initially pays little attention to their entreaties, a close friend's untimely death and dying exhortations influence Eliza greatly. Concerning Eliza's friend, the author notes the following:

⁴¹ First, availability of primary texts poses a problem for any literary historian. The ATS tracts prior to 1850 prove particularly difficult to obtain, due in large part to the combined effect of their frequent use and the low printing quality that made them initially so economically attractive. However, through work with the ATS archives in Garland, Texas and the de Grummond Children's Literature Collection at the University of Southern Mississippi and through private purchase, I have been able to review a significant number of these.

It was the good pleasure of God, ere she was removed from the earth, to make the words which dropped from her lips the means, in his hands, of the conversion of the child whose history is before us. (8)

Based on Eliza's lack of prayer, the friend observes that Eliza must be a "very wicked girl." Her admonition to Eliza to pray makes a considerable impression, one that lingers after the girl's death the next day, causing Eliza to examine her own character with new intensity. Eliza's introspection leads her to an understanding of herself as "both a prayerless and graceless child" (9).

For the first time, Eliza begins to pray for mercy, and "from this memorable day it seems that her character was changed," a change that occurs repeatedly in ATS narratives. Her newfound reliance on Jesus Christ as her savior completely transforms her, but she remains timid about sharing this news with her friends and family. Not until she is "laid upon a bed of sickness" is she emboldened to speak of her faith. In her twelfth year, Eliza is diagnosed with consumption. The narrator of the tract visits her in her home and describes the condition characteristic of children in these ATS deathbed scenes: "Death had plainly fixed his mark upon her. There was, however, a pleasing serenity in her countenance, and something truly engaging in her aspect" (10).

In the interchange between the narrator and Eliza that follows, the reader is introduced to the gospel message. Eliza confesses that she is a sinner, "Yes, sir, a very great one" (11). However, she expresses confidence that her home will be in heaven because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross. The narrator's words clearly outline the Biblical message that the ATS intends to convey to its readers. Echoing the scripture from the book of Matthew, the narrator observes, "How kind and gracious is it in Jesus

Christ, that he will receive little children like you" (11)! Eliza sweetly replies, "Yes, sir; he has said, 'They that seek him early shall find him'" (11, quoting Prov. 8.17). Through this deathbed interchange of scriptural language, the ATS encourages its readers to prepare for eternity by seeking a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Later in this same conversation, Eliza's words echo those of Maria, Ophelia, Charlotte, and Eliza Wharton. When asked if she would like to get well, Eliza replies, "I think, sir, I would rather depart . . . I should be with the Lord, sir, and away from this world of sin, where there is nothing to make me wish to stay" (12). Though similar to the sentiment expressed by the pregnant women in the early novels, Eliza's outlook contrasts starkly. Where the women of the early texts reflect an uncertainty symptomatic of a Calvinistic view of death, Eliza's attitude is the product of the author's evangelical leanings. Eliza reflects the outlook ideally adopted by the true believer, resting assured of her heavenly home and looking forward to the homecoming that she is prepared to receive from Jesus her savior.

Like children in the other tracts (and, as chapter four will demonstrate, in the subsequent sentimental bestsellers), Eliza's primary concern on her deathbed seems to be the spiritual state of those around her. When her father expresses joy at the spiritual change that has come over her, she shares her fears concerning her brother. "Oh, my poor brother! . . . I am afraid he never prays" (12). Her care for her sibling touches both her father and the narrator, causing them to decide that "though young in years" she possessed "the dignity and firmness of an established Christian," characteristics of the *puer senex*. Though Eliza lacks the short lifetime of devotion to Bible study and church

attendance exhibited in later tracts, her discernment of her own condition and that of others illustrates her youthful wisdom.

When the narrator returns, he finds Eliza much worse. But her decline is physical only, as her spirits continue to be buoyed by the promise of heaven after death. Her demeanor remains one of serenity and joy. "Many, I know, are afraid of the grave, but it is not so with me; I think more of my precious soul, and of the happiness of heaven," she declares to her visitor (13). Though her body is quickly declining, the narrator notes, "her soul was ripening for glory," a phrase used in this and other tracts to denote, not only the children's developing spirituality, but also the increasingly ethereal physical qualities taken on by the young girls as death approaches.⁴²

Building on this observation, the narrator pauses to address the reader concerning the condition of his or her own soul, before returning to Eliza's narrative. Visiting her once more before her death, the narrator learns from Eliza that she is "filled with joy and peace" (15). And, as the narrator prepares to leave her, Eliza offers a promise of restored community in the afterlife that appears with great frequency in subsequent examples of the sentimental deathbed scene: "Farewell, till we part no more" (15). The dying girl's words encourage her visitor to look towards their reunion in heaven. The day after this visit, Eliza passes into the afterlife. Before she expires, Eliza offers, seemingly to those who attend her, two lines of solace from "The Song of Simeon," Hymn 1.19 by Isaac Watts: "A mortal paleness on my cheek, / And glory in my soul" (16). Eliza's father offers a description of her last moments on earth: "A little before she departed, she said,

⁴² One of the earliest uses of this phrase is by John Newton (1725-1807), author of the hymn "Amazing Grace," in a 1776 letter to a fellow pastor.

in a very low tone, 'I am going.' I replied, 'Yes, my dear, you will now soon be at home'" (16).

Eliza Thornton includes an early example of the deathbed scene that became formulaic by the mid-nineteenth century. Characterized by a longing to complete the journey home to Heaven, the central character reflects the evangelical outlook of her creator and publisher. From the serenity of Eliza's appearance to her expressed preference for death to the exhortation of the loved ones that surround her, *Eliza Thornton* exemplifies the modifications made by the ATS to the standard sentimental deathbed scenes of the early novels. With some variation, *Little Ann* contains many of the same ATS features.

Little Ann, tract number 8, was written by the Rev. Mr. Marks and first published by the ATS in 1828. In this tract, the author emphasizes Ann's confident readiness for death, including a recounting of her funerary preparations, which stands in stark contrast to the uncertainty with which the early novels' protagonists faced death. As in other ATS works, *Little Ann* presents the brief life story of a virtuous young girl whose faith sustains her in the face of an early death. Her unassailable religious beliefs help her to reframe her untimely demise as a homecoming, a journey that she longs to take. Marks employs the same epistolary tradition as Brown and Foster, presenting Ann's story as a series of three letters penned by the author, Marks, and addressed to "my dear friend."

Marks becomes acquainted with Ann at the terminus of her life as she lies dying in a bed. A mutual friend introduces the two, believing that the Reverend would enjoy meeting such a "pious and intelligent child" (4). Upon their first meeting, Marks immediately discerns that Ann's "whole mind and thoughts were abstracted from

surrounding and visible things, and fixed on those which are invisible and eternal” (6).

Ann’s demeanor and spiritual understanding quickly remind Marks of the words of Jesus to his apostles: “Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven” (7, quoting Matt. 19.14). Marks is pleased by the depth of Ann’s knowledge concerning spiritual matters, and she reveals that she has long been a faithful devotee of a well-conducted Sunday school.

Midway through their first encounter, Ann informs Marks of her conviction that she will soon die. However, she expresses strong faith in Jesus and discloses that she longs to be with him. Marks concludes his first letter with the promise of relating “particulars of her experience and closing scene” (11) and his observation that “she was strong in faith, and seemed only to look and long for the coming of her Lord” (10).

In Letter II, the reader learns that Ann is fading fast from consumption. Marks’s second encounter with the dying girl reveals choice details about the child’s history. Through a series of early childhood anecdotes, the author reinforces the ATS’s adoption of the *puer senex* convention. Little Ann is discovered, for example, to have sought God in prayer to help overcome her fear of the dark. Readers further learn that as Ann “advanced in days” and “continued to grow in grace, and in the knowledge and love of God, her Saviour” (17, quoting 2 Pet. 3.18), she was given responsibilities commensurate with her spiritual maturity.

Marks relates that Ann is selected to present a weekly Bible lesson to the inhabitants of the local poor house in the absence of the minister. In this capacity, Ann ministers to Jane, a “streetwalker,” whose description and brief history echo the stories of Charlotte Temple and Eliza Wharton: “Men had helped to betray, and had then forsaken

her, and women had shunned and spurned her from their doors" (19). Ann's ministry to this fallen woman results in the woman's salvation when "her spirit was summoned into the presence of a righteous Judge, and a merciful Saviour" (20, quoting 1 Tim. 4.8).

Though "poor Jane" dies, like Charlotte and Eliza, as a result of the "course of life" she has led (19), Marks takes care to draw a clear distinction between the death of Jane, in whom "faith in our Lord Jesus Christ, advanced in her soul" (20), and the deaths of the early novels' fallen women. The young girl also assists an orphan named Mary and rebukes her elders when their conversation takes a "light and unprofitable turn" (21).

Marks punctuates the account of each of these good deeds with an exhortation to the reader. Repeatedly, he urges his readers to heed the example set by Little Ann:

Oh, that every one, . . . were more like thee Then would our souls thrive as a watered garden, and we should go on our way rejoicing, even in tribulation, and glorifying God our Saviour. (16)

This passage from *Little Ann* incorporates language characteristic of Scripture.

Particularly, the author of this tract echoes the phrasing of Isaiah 58.11, Jeremiah 31.12, Luke 5.25, and Acts 8.39. And like other tracts, *Little Ann* includes more than ten references to individual hymns ranging from "Time and Eternity" (13-14) to "Jesus, My All, to Heaven is Gone" (28-29).⁴³ Marks concludes Letter II with an encouragement to meditate on the events of Ann's life that he has revealed thus far.

In Letter III, Marks turns to a description of Ann's final year of life, when she is "young, indeed, in months and days, as we compute time, but far advanced in the divine life" (22), the very definition of the *puer senex*. In this final year, her health continues its

⁴³ "Time and Eternity" appears as "Hymn XXXIII" in *Hymns for Infant Minds* (c. 1809) by Ann Taylor, while "Jesus, My All, to Heaven is Gone" is included in John Cennick's *Sacred Hymns for the Use of Religious Societies* (1743). Cennick's lyrics reappear in *Catharine Helfenstein*.

decline, confining her to her home. Ann gathers all of her possessions and divides them among the different members of her family.⁴⁴ Like many of her ATS peers, Ann provides funeral instructions, naming her pallbearers and her burial site. Though eighteenth- and nineteenth-century children were more familiar with death and its trappings than their twentieth-century counterparts, the narrative inclusion of this funerary pre-planning by ATS characters seems to serve as further indication of the characters' exemplary spiritual preparation rather than as record of a standard consideration among dying children. In keeping with the evangelical ideal, Ann's preparation reflects her readiness and even eagerness to journey home. Marks verbalizes the evangelical hope of restored community when he says, "Farewell, my younger sister, farewell, until we meet in an undying world" (10). Though she will proceed him, Marks hopes to follow Ann "home."

Ann, like Eliza in the previous tract, recoils from those who wish her a speedy recovery. When such a sentiment is expressed, Marks records that Ann replies, "I do not wish to live" (26). The similarities between *Little Ann* and other tracts include a conversation in which the gospel message is discussed for the benefit of the reader. An essential part of that message is the confession of sin. Ann does not hesitate in her admission, "I find I am a great sinner, sir" (28). However, this confession is again followed by the declaration of confidence in the saving power of Jesus as expressed in her exhortation to repentance. Ann, speaking of her fellow schoolchildren, says, "Tell them to love God in time of health—tell them that Jesus Christ died for them" (31). Ann's life ends like those of her comrades; she expressed great happiness and "her happy spirit . . . escaped the prison of the body, and fled to the assembly of angels" (32). Little Ann triumphs because, like her ATS colleagues, "her young, but enlightened mind, had

⁴⁴ This scene foreshadows the actions of Eva St. Clare in Stowe's novel, as I will discuss below.

been enabled to discover the pearl of great price; and her soul had grasped it as her own inestimable treasure" (5). As in *Eliza Thornton*, the *puer senex* exhorts those in the community around her through a combination of hymns and scriptural language. The key motivation behind the exhortation is the restoration of that earthly community in the afterlife. This motivation and the resulting exhortation are even more prominently featured in another ATS publication, *Catharine Helfenstein*, which appeared on the Society's list of publications as early as 1831.

Catharine Helfenstein, tract number 32, recounts the story of a young Bible scholar who dies at age twelve. When read in the context of its sister ATS publications, this tract further develops the Society's revisioning of the sentimental deathbed scene through the tract's emphasis on Catharine's exhortations of those around her, a key component of sentimental deathbed scenes in the bestsellers that follow. For these exhortations to be effective, ATS authors removed the conventional dying character from isolation and transformed the deathbed into a communal gathering of relatives and friends.

The fictional Catharine, daughter of Rev. Albert Helfenstein, lived from 1817 to 1829 in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. From her earliest attempts at speech, the name of Jesus was on her tongue, according to the tract's admiring narrator who retrospectively professes to have known Catharine as a student. Even as a toddler, she is reported to have shown a devotion to prayer and a delight in hearing the Bible read aloud. In short, Catharine is portrayed as having been a *puer senex* and the model child: "She was always found in her place, attentive to her lessons, respectful to her teachers, and solemn in her deportment" (6).

During the last year of her life, Catharine becomes increasingly spiritually minded, “devotedly attached to all the exercises of religion” (7). Her love of reading the Bible and other religious materials increases, as does her fondness for hymns and her enjoyment found “in the society of the pious” (9). The narrator, who identifies himself/herself as one of Catharine’s teachers, identifies the child’s growing ethereal nature: “About this period her mind seemed to be absorbed in the contemplation of divine things, so that surrounding objects almost ceased to attract her attention” (10). Catharine delights in attending religious meetings, “especially the female prayer-meetings of the church.” In her last year, the narrator notes that Catharine does not require a single word of correction, her temper becomes unflappable, and she submits to authority with great patience and meekness. Catharine is, like Eliza Thornton, “doubtless ripening for glory” (11). Catharine’s very surname seems to indicate her reliance on God. Translated roughly from the German as “helper stone,” *Helfenstein* represents a possible reference by the author to the *Ebenezer* of 1 Samuel 7.12 or to characterizations of the Old Testament God as a “rock” in passages such as 2 Samuel 22.3 and Psalm 18.2.

After Catharine’s health begins to decline, she is sent away to stay with relatives in hopes of a recovery. However, an earache and a neck swelling herald the beginning of a rapid decline of just a few days. Soon after, she begins to have difficulty breathing which causes her to contemplate anew her eternal destination. Catharine is attended by her aunt with whom she prays, sings a few line from Watts’s Hymn 2.31, “Christ’s Presence Makes Death Easy,” and finds solace.

Though Catharine is informed that her disease will likely end in death, she is able to endure her sufferings “with fortitude and apparent resignation” (13). With her end

imminent, Catharine again counsels with her aunt concerning the redemptive work of Jesus on the cross. Though she acknowledges herself to be a sinner, Catharine declares her confidence in the cleansing power of Christ's blood and in her eternal destination. "Oh, I am going home to him—I am going to glory—I am going to Moses and the redeemed of Israel" (13).

The dying girl's last hours draw to a close, and the room fills with family and friends anxious to witness her "joy unspeakable and full of glory" and to catch the glowing language of this happy child (14, quoting 1 Pet. 1.8). After announcing that she will soon "have wings like Noah's dove," Catharine takes advantage of the gathered crowd of onlookers to exhort them to consider the condition of their souls:

"If there be any here that have not experienced religion, let them pray; for Jesus is here, and he will bless them." With many more words did she exhort all around, and call them to the standard of the cross. (15)

A clergyman, "Rev. Mr. E--," follows Catharine's exhortation with a prayer in which he prays for her restoration to health. The little girl interrupts his intonations, "Oh, I don't want to live." Like her sisters in the ATS's other deathbed scenes, Catharine values her heavenly home far too much to further linger on earth.

Just before Catharine begins to slip away, she sends messages to her brother and sisters to remember God. Next, Catharine sends her love and exhortation "to the colored girl living at her father's house, and whom she had been in the habit of instructing" (15). With these last instructions, the earthly plane begins to lose focus for the dying girl, and heaven opens "its glories to her mind" (16).

Catharine's dying moment is similar to those of the other dying children of tracts, and as will be seen in chapter four, it is even more strikingly similar to those of the dying characters of the later sentimental bestsellers:

Angels were standing prepared to convey her departing spirit into the bosom of Abraham, and while they sweetly whispered, "Come away," she responded aloud to the joyous message, "Glory to the Lord. Hallelujah!" (16)⁴⁵

As in the other tracts, a young child goes "home" to live in glory with her savior. Her dying attitude is one of joy and excited anticipation. Furthermore, she provides a valuable lesson in spiritual preparation to those gathered in her room and the readers of this tract around the nation. Gone is the "wages of sin is death" message of Romans 6.23 found in the early novels; it is replaced instead with the evangelical exhortation to "become like little children" (7, quoting Matt. 18.3) and the reminder that "they that seek me early, shall find me" (7, quoting Prov. 8.17).

The Springfield Cottage-Girl, tract number 26 (c. 1848), outlines the brief life of Emma, a young girl in the village of Springfield, England. Emma's story continues to develop the pattern established in other ATS tracts. The reader encounters the moving story of another young girl, known for her spirituality, who is claimed by an untimely

⁴⁵ As do many such passages in ATS publications, this passage seems to evidence the influence of Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678), which an 1828 issue of *The American Tract Magazine* characterizes as "doubtless one of the most useful of all human publications" ("Recent Publications" 132). Particularly influential are the death scenes of Bunyan's Christian and Christiana. Christian's passage across the Waters of Death is attended, like Catharine's, by heavenly beings: "Now upon the bank of the River, on the other side, they saw the two shining men again, who there waited for them" (149). Christiana's death in part two with its female pilgrim, gathered family members, and parting words establishes many of the scene's characteristics later employed by ATS authors:

"Now the Day drew on that Christiana must be gone. So the Road was full of People to see her take her Journey. ... So she came forth and entered the River, with a Beck'n of Fare well, to those that followed her to the River side. The last word she was heard to say here was, I come Lord, to be with thee and bless thee!" (285)

death at age twelve. Emma's final hours provide onlookers and readers with an instructional moment as both groups marvel at her joy and at the condition of her soul.

The tract's author opens the description of Emma in much the same manner employed by the author of *Catharine Helfenstein*. Like Catharine, Emma is a model child in a variety of areas. The author notes,

She was quick of understanding in things pertaining to religion; very studious to oblige and please; skilful in the management of her younger brothers and sisters, and exemplary in her conduct to her parents. (4)

Whether in religious, domestic, or intellectual matters, Emma's behavior and attitude are exemplary.

It is in her spiritual life, a life distinctly different from those of the fallen women of Rowson, Foster, and Brown, that Emma is most noteworthy. Though she loves attending church, Emma tends her siblings so her mother can go to worship. Nevertheless, her presence at the service was one of her greatest joys: "Neither the rain nor the cold, her parent's consent once obtained, kept her back from the multitude of those who delighted to enter the gates of Zion" (6). Through the influence of her pious mother, Emma is well acquainted with the scriptures and the power of prayer, tools which serve her in good stead in her eleventh and twelfth years of life. At age ten, Emma presciently tells her minister, "I should like when I die to be an angel of God, or to live with the angels, and, like them, sing the praises of God" (5).

In November 1836, Emma falls ill; "It pleased God to lay his hand upon Emma, and greatly to afflict her" (7). What starts as a pain in the heel soon includes loss of appetite, insomnia, and generalized discomfort. Emma's physicians diagnose a terminal

illness of an undisclosed nature. Her mother takes this opportunity to discuss with her daughter the condition of her soul. When she initially asks Emma if she is afraid to die, her daughter answers in the affirmative for fear of unforgiven sins. Her mother quickly offers the following comfort: "God is so merciful, that he will forgive you, if you ask him. And Jesus, you know, invites little children to come to him" (8).

After a period of prayer, Emma develops great confidence in her eternal destination. "Well, mother dear, I am not now afraid to die. I hope that my sins are forgiven. I feel assured that they are . . . I feel so happy, I must sing" (8). This instance of singing marks the first of seven different instances of singing in this short narrative. Emma's confidence is retained until her death after nine weeks of painful lingering illness. Throughout this period, she often asserts her excited anticipation about her death. "Now I am happy; now I am not afraid to die," she declares (10).

As with many of the other children in the ATS tracts, Emma uses her deathbed as a pulpit. From her supine position, she exhorts her father, her brothers, her mother, her grandmother, and her friends, each individually, to repent of their sins and to pray. Emma concludes these individual appeals with the following generalized exhortation:

Then speaking to and of her friends and neighbors, brothers and sisters, and school-fellows, she said, "There is room in heaven for all, if they will but seek forgiveness before it is too late. I hope I shall meet you all there. I wish to do it."

(11)

Emma's hope and seeming uncertainty is not for herself (about her own fate she is confident), but rather for the destination of her listeners' souls as she expresses her desire for a continuation of this earthly community in heaven.

In her last moments, Emma provides the reader and listener with a brief presentation of the gospel message, including her confession of sinfulness and her confidence in Christ. When asked about her affliction by her mother, the young girl replies,

“Mother, whom the Lord loveth he afflicteth. I hope that I am one of his children....I am not afraid to die; not because I have done anything myself; I am a great sinner; I know I have offended Christ; but I am sure that Christ has died for me.” (12)

And with this presentation of the good news, Emma sings a few lines of a hymn and passes away at age twelve.

The author’s last words remind the reader of the real message of this tract, the same message presented in other ATS tracts with deathbed scenes: “Doubtless of such children is the kingdom of God and of heaven” (16). Once again, the ATS uses the death of an innocent child to drive home its points about readiness for death and the condition of the soul. “If you become like these little children in spirit, in thought, and in deed, you will enter the kingdom of heaven. Do not delay in putting your spiritual house in order,” the Society urges its readers. Only by heeding this message will readers enjoy the confidence felt by these dying children rather than the uncertainty faced by the women of the early novels.

Tract number 97, *Margaret* (c. 1848), is likely the last published of the five tracts under consideration.⁴⁶ This text contains all the combined elements of a classic ATS deathbed scene as developed in previous tracts. In this text, the reader encounters the

⁴⁶ This determination is based on internal evidence such as typeface and numbering and external evidence such as published listings of tract titles.

puer senex in the character of an underprivileged child who gains renown for her devotion to scripture and God. This exemplary life is cut short at age twelve by an illness which the title character bears with joy and thanksgiving. At her death, she expresses happiness over her coming journey to heaven.

Margaret tells the story of a poor, young orphan girl. Luckily for Margaret, the town's leading family constructs a church and school for the benefit of the community's poor. "Mrs. G" instructs young women in the art of needlework and other skills "that would tend to make them good housewives or good servants" (5). Margaret is admitted to the school at age nine and is quite happy. She soon earns a name for herself with her "good conduct and attention to learning" (6). Though Margaret is exposed to a wide variety of texts and skills, the author notes, "Of all her books Margaret appeared to love the Bible best" (6). Her appointment as school monitor and her sweet singing voice both tempt her to vanity, but she manages to keep this in check through prayer and Bible study.

Her achievements at school are soon eclipsed by another development in her life: "When she was only twelve years old her health began to fail" (9). Margaret goes to live with the wealthy Mrs. G, but her health continues a steady decline. When her illness requires her to drop out of school, the author attributes to Margaret an action that appears repeatedly in this type of tract; she exhorts her classmates to "love and serve God in their youth" (11). Despite her poor health, Margaret's real concern remains the souls of those around her.

When she receives the news that she will soon die, Margaret's response is predictable to readers familiar with the ATS's publications. She greets the news with the

calm of one who is prepared to meet her creator. Her friends are surprised that she shows no fear, but instead begins to “prepare for the great change that awaited her” (12).⁴⁷ Her remaining days are filled with Bible study, visits to her old schoolmates, and worship at the local church. Returning from one of these services near the end of her life, Margaret remarks,

I feel now just as if I was leaving the world; as if I had given up every thing, and only had to wait until God called me to go where his children are, and where Jesus Christ prayed that all who loved and served him might be with him for ever.
(14)

From the time that she first falls ill, Margaret looks longingly toward her final homecoming. Margaret’s understanding of her plight is quite different than the understanding expressed by the women of the early novels. When her classmates weep at her weakened state, Margaret counters with the following words:

Do not grieve for me; I would not change places with any one. God was very good to send me pain and sickness; I fear I should not have loved him so well if I had been left in ease and health. (15)

Concerning Margaret’s final hours, the author notes that “the closing incident of her life was interesting and affecting.”

As she lies on her deathbed, Margaret is attended by the minister of her congregation. Seeing that her death is imminent, he asks her “if she was happy” (16). Leaning close to hear her weakened voice, the minister hears Margaret reply, “Yes, quite

⁴⁷ A further exploration may be warranted of the connection between child death and child sexuality. Though not likely a concern of the ATS with its *contemptus mundi* outlook, modern scholars may interpret the Society’s use of language such as “the great change” and “ripening” as reflective of adolescent sexual maturation. However, such connections would reduce the absolute claims of religion to the relativistic claims of recent critical theory.

happy; Jesus Christ will be with me.” Again in this tract, the author utilizes the evangelicalized version of the deathbed scene as adopted and revised by the ATS from the early American sentimental novels of Rowson, Brown, and Foster. Margaret does not suffer from a damaged reputation nor does she waste away concerned about her soul’s destination. Instead, she is surrounded by friends and clergy who express admiration for her innocence and spirituality as she prepares to complete her journey home to heaven, thereby providing a spiritual model for all readers.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Americans experienced a period of dramatic upheaval, characterized by increases in urbanization, industrialization and the child mortality rate. These changes disrupted the eighteenth-century pattern of isolated rural communities and facilitated a cross-pollination of ideas that lessened the influence of Calvinism. Among the casualties of these traumatic changes were the sense of community enjoyed by rural Americans and the Calvinistic view of death fraught with uncertainty and fear. In an effort to combat these changes or at least cope with them, nineteenth-century Americans, and especially evangelicals, chose to romanticize the idea of death. This romanticization emphasized death as a positive reward rather than as a negative punishment for immorality. Evangelicalized death portrayed heaven as home and death as a homecoming. This view developed, in part, as an effort to restore the disintegrating sense of community. The reward for a life well-lived was the eternal restoration of community in heaven with Jesus and the saints.

The ATS understood these changes and capitalized on them in their portrayal of dying children in the tracts’ deathbed scenes. Though the death scene had long been a staple of British and early American sentimentalism, the ATS retained only a few of the

characteristics of these early scenes: the use of typically female victims, dying protagonists who welcome their own demise, and the depiction of death for instructional purposes. The ATS did adopt these sentimental conventions, but they adapted them in a number of ways to better suit their evangelical aims. Rather than portray the decline of a fallen woman, the ATS inserted the *puer senex* into the role of the dying protagonist. This child with an adult's wisdom better suited the Society's instructional purpose. This child typically exhibits not only a preference for death but a confidence about her eternal destination. Furthermore, the protagonists of the ATS tracts enjoy a sense of community denied the isolated and alienated women portrayed by Rowson, Foster, and Brown. The deathbed is transformed from a scene of gloom, alienation, and uncertainty into a scene of joy, fellowship, and peace about the eternal destination. Throughout the tracts, these scenes are infused with an evangelical blend of hymns and scriptural language.

One of the biggest adjustments made by the ATS to the deathbed motif involves the lesson intended for the reader. Whereas the early novels offered a "wages of sin is death" (Rom. 6.23) moral, the tracts provide more positive messages. First, the ATS publications encourage the reader to consider the condition of his or her soul with the biblical reminder that sinners must "become as little children." The ATS uses these scenes to illustrate the proper condition of the soul for meeting its maker, providing texts that serve as *exempla* of Scripture. Second, the untimely deaths of the juvenile protagonists serve to remind readers that death comes unexpectedly, or "as a thief in the night" (1 Thess. 5.2). The use of child deaths underscores the urgency of the conversion experience and the importance of seeking Jesus before death comes "out of season" (1 Tim. 4.2). This two-pronged message urges readers to consider the condition of their

own souls, preparing their hearts for the reception of the tracts' gospel message presentation. The Society hoped that these tracts would soften the hearts of the unsaved, ripening them for conversion and leading ultimately to the widespread repentance necessary for the advent of the millennium.

The deathbed scenes portrayed in ATS tracts represent the origin of the conventional sentimental deathbed scene portrayed in the novels of Stowe, Cummins, and Warner. Although Karen Sanchez-Eppler considers the dying child to be the "founding trope of sentimentalism" ("Then When" 66), she provides examples only from the middle decades of the 1800s, and though Lewis Saum identifies this conventional portrayal as a "generic format" ("Death" 78), he also dates its advent to the mid-nineteenth century. However, I contend that this conventional portrayal appeared in the first few decades of the nineteenth century when it was popularized by the ATS in its many tract narratives. Diana Pasulka supports my contention, referring to early nineteenth-century child hagiographies in general as the "narrative ancestors" of mid-nineteenth-century fiction (57). The work of the ATS in adopting and adapting the deathbed scene, accomplished by blending early American sentimentalism with nineteenth-century evangelicalism, provides an important link between the seemingly disparate sentimentalisms of the early republic and the mid-nineteenth century. In chapter four, I will provide both a biographical examination of Cummins, Warner, and Stowe, and a close reading of the deathbed scenes of *The Lamplighter*, *The Wide Wide World*, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. This dual approach will illustrate the likely influence of the ATS tracts on the work of these bestselling authors.

CHAPTER IV

“WHAT A THING ‘T IS TO BE A CHRISTIAN!”:

THE DEATH SCENES IN THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY BESTSELLERS

An examination of the ATS's publications yields exciting evidence of the society's adaptation of standard sentimental conventions, particularly deathbed scenes. Even more interesting, however, is the yield from an examination of the sentimental bestsellers of the 1850s. Traditionally regarded by critics as the archetypical examples of American sentimentalism, the bestselling novels of Susan Warner, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Maria Cummins bear unmistakable traces of the evangelical influence at work in the early nineteenth century. By continuing my discussion with an examination of deaths in the novels *The Lamplighter*, *The Wide Wide World*, and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, I intend to further identify the ATS as one likely source of American sentimentalism's revisioning of death.

The dramatic differences between portrayals of death in the early novels of Brown, Rowson, and Foster and those in the bestsellers of Cummins, Warner, and Stowe are the result, in part, of the widespread early nineteenth-century influence of evangelicalism. These differences include the protagonist's attitude toward death in her or his final days, the sense of community enjoyed by the dying character, and the intended message to the readers. The early novels' emphasis on death as a consequence of sin and as a separation from community stands in stark contrast to the bestsellers' portrayal of death as a reward for a virtuous life and a reliance on God. The later novels also emphasize the possibility for a restoration in the afterlife of the sense of community that disappeared with the advent of industrialization at the turn of the century. These

differences are partially explained when the pervasive tracts of the ATS are identified as potential source material for the later bestselling novels. Like those tracts, the bestsellers of Cummins, Warner, and Stowe continue to exhibit the presence of community at death, the increasingly ethereal nature of the dying victim, the prospect of an eternal restoration of community, the use of scriptural language, the dying victim's exhortation of others, and the expression of a preference for death accompanied by an embrace of death as the Lord's will.

Despite the critical hazards associated with biographical research, in this chapter I argue for a connection between each author and the evangelical publishers as represented by the ATS. I contend that the authors had possible exposure to evangelical publications because of religious affiliations and the likely presence and popularity of these publications within the authors' circles of influence and intercourse. While some of the authors' lives suggest only a probable connection to the ATS (in the case of Susan Warner), others' biographies provide historical evidence documenting the link between the author and the Society (in the case of Harriet Beecher Stowe).

In this chapter, I will examine Cummins's *The Lamplighter* first in order to illustrate the possible influence of the nineteenth century's revisioning of death on those with no direct ties to evangelicalism or the ATS. Following this, I will explore the biographical and textual connections to the ATS that make the influence of the Society on Warner and Stowe likely. By approaching these novels in order of increasing adherence to the ATS formula for sentimental deathbed scenes, I hope to illustrate that one component of *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* remarkable popular success was its total inclusion of the evangelicalized scene's characteristics. Of these three bestselling novelists, Stowe

most closely patterns her death scenes on those of the tracts. Furthermore, this examination will continue to illustrate the chain of influence that has shaped the historical evolution of American sentimentalism.

Maria Cummins and *The Lamplighter*

Maria Susanna Cummins was a bestselling author of the nineteenth century about whom relatively little is known.⁴⁸ She was born in Salem, Massachusetts in 1827, where she spent much of her early childhood. She came from a family of comparably high social status and affluence (Saulsbury 81); her father was a judge who moved the family to Dorchester, six miles from Boston, where she spent the rest of her life. Cummins was one of eight children (Baym, "Introduction" xiii), and she was educated at home by her father, who encouraged her talent for writing. In her later years, she attended the school of Mrs. Charles Sedgwick, sister-in-law of Catharine Maria Sedgwick (*Hope Leslie*, 1827), who undoubtedly further encouraged the young author.

Cummins achieved early literary notice with the publication of several works in *The Atlantic Monthly*. In 1854, at age 27, Cummins published *The Lamplighter* anonymously through John P. Jewett, who also issued the bestselling *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The novel quickly outsold *The Wide Wide World* and was second only to Stowe's bestseller in total sales (Saulsbury 82). In the first eight weeks, Cummins sold 40,000 copies, and by the end of the first year, she had sold 70,000 copies (M. D. Bell 80). The publishing periodicals of the day recorded with astonishment the brisk sales pace with

⁴⁸ No book-length biographies of Cummins exist. Despite her remarkable publishing successes, she receives only brief mention in such reference works as *Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers* (1997), *The Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Vol. 42: *American Writers for Children Before 1900* (1985), and *Writers of the American Renaissance* (2003).

large-sized announcements: “20,000 in 20 days” and “40,000 in 8 weeks” (Williams, “Promoting” 185). Announcements from 1863 report sales of over 93,000 copies (195).

The Lamplighter was readily available in a variety of formats, ranging from abridged children’s picture books to lavishly illustrated editions aimed at art connoisseurs to cheaply printed copies intended for travelers (180). Like *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Cummins’s novel was adapted for the stage, where it met with mixed reviews. The novel was published also in British editions by Routledge, which sold over 100,000 copies in two months (198). The book was quickly translated into German (1854), Dutch (1854), French (1855), Italian (1855), Czech (1872), and Danish (1902), and it received almost universal praise, becoming the most talked about novel of its time (Williams, “Promoting” 199). Critics praised its literary and moral distinctions, and Susan Williams notes that it received glowing reviews by sources as diverse as *Godey’s Lady’s Book* and *The Knickerbocker* (“Promoting” 190). It was the success enjoyed by *The Lamplighter* that occasioned Nathaniel Hawthorne’s famous statement in a letter to his editor William D. Ticknor in 1855: “America is now wholly given over to a d—d mob of scribbling women” whose “trash” has seduced “the public taste” (Hawthorne 304). Like Warner and Stowe, Cummins never again experienced the popularity of *The Lamplighter* with her later works. She died in 1866 at age 39 of an “abdominal disease” (83).

Though Cummins has no discernable link to the American Tract Society, her life evidences a dedication to religion. While in Dorchester, she joined the First Parish Church, Meeting House Hill. First Parish Church was originally a Congregationalist Church that became the First Unitarian Church under the guidance of the Rev. Thaddeus Mason Harris who led the congregation from 1793 to 1836. Here, Cummins taught

Sunday School (Gay 143), and it is no coincidence that *The Lamplighter* was used in many Unitarian Sunday School classes for instruction.

Tenets of the Unitarian faith include a belief in the single personality of God rather than in the concept of the trinity and, by some adherents, a denial of the divinity of Christ, beliefs that placed Unitarians in direct opposition to the evangelical Executive Committee of the ATS. Cummins's identification with Unitarianism likely lessened her susceptibility to the influence of the evangelical presses, particularly to the ATS, as it embodied a Trinitarian opposition to her faith tradition. The first president of the ATS, from 1825 to 1842, was Sampson V. S. Wilder, a merchant and philanthropist. One of his philanthropic endeavors involved a major financial contribution to the construction of Hillside Church near his home in Bolton, Massachusetts; Hillside was an evangelical congregation formed to oppose the influence of Unitarianism. Lewis Tappan, another wealthy merchant and philanthropist, originally attended William Ellery Channing's Unitarian congregation in Boston and served as the first treasurer of the American Unitarian Association (Wright 158). However, through the teaching of the Rev. Lyman Beecher, he became convinced that his Unitarian beliefs were in error; Tappan was later instrumental in the ongoing financial support of the ATS.

The ATS viewed Unitarian doctrine as false teaching and actively campaigned against it. The Society published such tracts as *Doctrine of the Trinity* by the Rev. Elias Cornelius, *Fatal Delusions* by the Rev. N. Murray, *The Fullness of Christ* by the Rev. Isaac Lewis, and *More than One Hundred Scriptural and Incontrovertible Arguments for the Divinity of Christ* by the Rev. Samuel Green, in addition to numerous tracts attacking the doctrines of deism and universalism. The ATS operated in direct competition with

the Unitarians' own press, the Publishing Fund. Though the novels of Stowe and Warner continue to incorporate hymns and the deathbed confession of Christ found with such frequency in the tracts, Cummins's novel lacks these two evangelical conventions introduced into the motif by the ATS, an omission likely due to Cummins's Unitarian upbringing. Nevertheless, the inclusion of the remaining evangelical traits in Cummins's deathbed scenes evidences the overwhelming influence of evangelicalism and the evangelical publishing houses on popular portrayals of death in the mid-nineteenth century, regardless of the author's denominational affiliation. Though Cummins likely eschewed the publications of the ATS, it seems evident from an examination of her bestselling novel that she was influenced by the nineteenth-century's evangelical revisioning of death.

Cummins was uncomfortable with fame, and she lived a secluded life in Dorchester, devoting herself to writing and church work.⁴⁹ Her most famous novel evidences her commitment to her faith, foregrounding its religious ideology in an "overt" manner (Baym, "Introduction" xix). The ability of Gertrude, the heroine in the novel, to make her way in the world is tied to her emerging piety and her development of a religion of the heart. She is mentored by various characters on this path to Christian virtue. Reviewers of the day unanimously praised *The Lamplighter* for its moral point of view and its edificatory piety.

The novel centers on the adventures of a young orphan girl named Gerty, who is thrown out of her foster home by the evil Nan Gant and is taken in by the title character,

⁴⁹ In keeping with her lifelong love of privacy, Cummins published anonymously all four of her novels: *The Lamplighter* (1854), *Mabel Vaughan* (1857), *El Fureidis* (1860), *Haunted Hearts* (1864).

the lamplighter Uncle True Flint.⁵⁰ Shortly after she comes to live with Uncle True, Gerty is befriended and nurtured by the kindly old man's neighbor, Mrs. Sullivan. This widow lady lives with her father and her son, Willie, who eventually marries the adult Gerty. Both Flint and Sullivan play crucial roles in Gerty's young adulthood, providing her with, respectively, a safe home and spiritual mentoring. Flint experiences a slow decline in his health after an occupational accident and subsequent stroke, and he dies early in the novel. Sullivan dies after contracting an undisclosed illness. In her examination of Cummins's novel, Marjorie Le Purnine argues that these death scenes are used to help readers understand how to cope with grief in a time of cultural instability and personal loss. For Purnine, Cummins encourages a relationship with a "diffuse Unitarian God" through her depiction of these deaths (18). Though Purnine does examine the deaths in the novel, her focus does not lead her to examine the origins of the death scenes, and this exploration of origins is critically important to a complete understanding of the evolution of American sentimentalism. Both of Cummins's fictional deaths emulate the following characteristics of the ATS's sentimental tracts: a view of death as part of God's plan, peace in the face of death, conviction that a heavenly home awaits, and exhortation of their loved ones.

Uncle True is the first in the novel to die. He has acted in his final days as Gerty's guardian and earthly savior. In turn, Gerty has given the old man a sense of peace through her daily reading from the Bible to him throughout his illness; True

⁵⁰Much of the novel's criticism focuses on the physical and spiritual development of Gerty Flint throughout the course of the text, with very little attention paid to the novel's death scenes. Elizabeth Barnes's *States of Sympathy* (1997) and Carol Gay's entry in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* are two such examples of this strain of criticism. Gay epitomizes these approaches with her description of the plot as one in which Gerty endures an "arduous struggle, physical and moral, to overcome herself and the world."

testifies, “Her words, and the blessed teachin’s of the Holy Book that she reads me every day, have sunk deep into my heart, and I’m at peace” (91). This is not the first time that Gerty has read to her guardian. Early in their association, Gerty frequently read to True as her education progressed. Interestingly, the reading material provided by Emily, her benefactor and friend, seems to indicate Cummins’s familiarity with tracts of the ATS mold despite her Unitarian upbringing. True “listened patiently and attentively while she read aloud to him story after story, of little girls who never told lies, boys who always obeyed their parents, or, more frequently still, of the child who knew how to keep her temper” (66). True mirrors Gerty’s emotions as she reads, “sympathizing as fully and heartily as she did in the sorrows of her little heroines, and rejoicing with her in the final triumph of truth, obedience and patience” (66).

True refers to the young girl as a “handmaiden of the Lord” (91), scriptural language borrowed from the Virgin Mary’s characterization of herself after a visit from the angel Gabriel in Luke 1.38. Effectively canonizing Gerty, True credits her constant reassurance that “The Lord will provide” with the serenity that has accompanied his final days (91, quoting Gen. 22.14). Though Gerty is not one of the novel’s dying characters, Cummins’s description of the orphan girl borrows liberally from the *puer senex* tradition, employing the same scriptural language as the ATS’s tracts to convey the young girl’s maturity. Cummins characterizes True as having “a pious heart” which “was fixed in humble trust on that God whose presence and love he had ever acknowledged, and on whom he so fully relied, that even in this bitter trial he was able to say, in perfect submission, ‘Thy will, not mine, be done’” (88, quoting Luke 22.42). In addition to the spiritual confidence exhibited by his ATS forerunners, Uncle True also experiences the

urge to exhort those about him as he nears death. He begins to tell Gerty to always be a good girl, but discovers that she has fled the room in grief at his impending end. The old man takes comfort in knowing that the young woman will have a spiritual guardian to watch over her, namely Miss Emily.

True also shares the Christian view of death. In the few brief pages that deal with his demise, he makes a number of comments that indicate his by now familiar perspective. He refers to himself in a conversation with Miss Emily as a person that is “just goin’ home to God, and feel as if I read his ways clearer than ever afore” (93). Like the characters from the ATS tracts, True is ready to go to his heavenly “home.” He has nothing left to hold him to the earth, “nothing in this world left to wish for” (93). The dying old man characterizes his last days as full of “perfect peace.” In keeping with this pattern, Flint understands his coming death as part of God’s plan; “It is God’s will to take me, Gerty; he has always been good to us, and we mustn’t doubt him now” (94). Even the old man’s departure is depicted in the same way as those of the ATS’s characters: “The messenger came,—a gentle, noiseless messenger,—and, in the still night, while the world was asleep, took the soul of good old True, and carried it home to God” (95).⁵¹

Mrs. Sullivan’s death is described in remarkably similar terms. Soon the reader discovers that the kindly widow is “rapidly passing away” (168). In her last hours, Gerty attends the ailing Sullivan’s bedside. Regarding the spiritual woman’s demise, Gerty offers, “I knew the Lord could never call you at a time when your lamp would not be

⁵¹ This characterization of death as “a messenger” appears in the cluster of death scenes at the end of part two of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and is common to the novels of Stowe and Warner, also. This phrase does not appear in the five tracts examined in this project. Instead, the authors of these texts frequently refer to “angels” as the guides to heaven at the moment of death; however, one meaning of the Greek word “angel” is “messenger.” Interestingly, the ATS does use “messenger” in the online version of its modern tract entitled *Harry Potter’s World*: “God sent a messenger, His own Son, Jesus, to bring us the message of a new life that’s waiting for us” (par. 11).

trimmed and burning" (169). Here, Cummins references the "Parable of the Ten Virgins" from Matthew 25, mentioned previously as a source of the evangelical message to "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh" (Matt. 25.13). Gerty also refers to her mentor as "a living lesson of piety and patience," labeling her as "one who seems so fit for heaven."

Initially, Mrs. Sullivan feels hesitation about dying as she worries about the future of her son, Willie. Gerty, however, reads to her from the Bible, and the older woman finds that the words "soothe her spirit, and reconcile her to the occasional rebellion of her own mortal nature" (169). The words enable Sullivan to experience a sleep that gives her dying features a peaceful aspect. In this sleep, the widow has a dream of her son and her continued posthumous influence on him. She awakens with great relief and a joyful heart that is ready to accept the plan of God. "A blessed angel has ministered unto me. . . I am persuaded that my departure is in perfect accordance with the schemes of a merciful Providence," she tells Gerty (172). She refers to her coming "home beyond the skies" and submits to God's will with a pious, "Thy will, not mine, be done" (172, quoting Luke 22.42). From that moment until her death, Mrs. Sullivan enjoyed a state of "perfect resignation and tranquility." Just like both True Flint and her ATS predecessors, the widow looks forward to heaven as her home, accepts her death as part of God's plan, and enjoys a sense of peace in the hours leading up to her actual demise.

Also like the ATS forerunners, Sullivan feels the same evangelical urge to exhort those around her that hits Uncle True. She takes advantage of her remaining time to pen a letter to her absent son in which she exhorts him to "cherish the same submissive love for the All-wise" (173). This exhortation echoes an earlier one made in person to her

son: "Love and fear God, Willie, and do not disappoint your mother" (107). It is in this context of mother that critic Claire Chantell considers the character of Mrs. Sullivan and her death. Penning one of the few treatments of the novel that address the death scenes, Chantell argues that, in the course of the novel, Mrs. Sullivan's influence is much more powerful *in absentia* after her death than it is in person when she exhorts her son face-to-face (140). This posthumous influence echoes the "cloud of witnesses" composed of departed saints that is mentioned in Hebrews 12.1, and Chantell's observations further evidence the likely impact of evangelicalism on Cummins's novel. At her death, Mrs. Sullivan sits holding hands peacefully with Gerty, and with a look of love for her adopted daughter, she expires. "It was done," pens Cummins, echoing the Biblical language of Christ's "It is finished" at his crucifixion (John 19.30) and echoing the ATS's inclusion of scriptural language.

Despite this allusion to Christ's death, Cummins omits aspects of the evangelicalized death scene that are common to the tracts and the bestsellers of Warner and Stowe. In particular, she does not incorporate the deathbed confession of Christ that appears in both the tracts and the other bestsellers, nor does she weave lines from hymns into the death scenes of *The Lamplighter*. It is tempting to ascribe this omission to the author's Unitarian faith and its lessened emphasis on the divinity of Jesus. However, in scenes that occur both before and after these death scenes, Cummins offers the reader brief versions of the gospel message. In the first chapter of the novel, the narrator comments on Gerty's pitiful spiritual state:

Poor little, untaught, benighted soul! Who shall enlighten thee? Thou art God's child, little one! Christ died for thee. Will he not send man or angel to light up the

darkness within, to kindle a light that shall never go out, the light that shall shine through all eternity! (4)

Near the end of the novel, a reference to Christ's death makes a second appearance in Gerty's own description of her faith.

I know of no religion but that of the heart. Christ died for us all alike, and, since few souls are so sunk in sin that they do not retain some spark of virtue and truth, who shall say in how many a light will at last spring up, by aid of which they may find their way to God? (305)

Interestingly, these two mentions of Christ mark the initiation and the maturation of Gerty's faith. Cummins elects to present the gospel message, not in the novel's death scenes, but in her depictions of the *puer senex*. Thus, readers of Cummins's bestseller receive a version of the "good news" just as plainly as do readers of the tracts.⁵²

Though Maria Cummins omitted several of the key elements that appear in the ATS's tracts, the number of similarities seems to indicate that, despite her Unitarian beliefs, the author was influenced by the evangelicalized version of the sentimental deathbed scene that the Society disseminated so heavily in the first half of the nineteenth century. While she does not include excerpts from hymns or the deathbed confession, a preponderance of the remaining elements does appear, however briefly, in the death scenes of Uncle True and Mrs. Sullivan. The inclusion of these elements illustrates the

⁵² Like the allusions to Christ's death, hymns fail to make an appearance as a part of the death scenes in *The Lamplighter*. In fact, hymns make no appearance in the novel at all, with the only mention of singing occurring in relation to a cage of birds. However, gospel hymns do appear in Cummins's later works. Lyrics from "The Happy Land," a hymn by Andrew Young, are included in *Mabel Vaughn* while the Matthew Arnold poem "Stagirius" appears as a hymn in *El Fureidis*. While this omission of hymns from the novel's death scenes represents a departure from the pattern of the tracts, it is unsurprising that Cummins's novel would deviate to a greater degree from the evangelical formula given Cummins's status as the author least in step with the evangelical doctrine of the ATS and its publications.

seemingly inescapable influence of the ATS and its publications that crossed denominational and doctrinal boundaries. The appearance of hymns in Cummins's later novels further suggests that the ATS continued to influence the author. More closely identified with, and thus more clearly influenced by, the evangelical forces was Susan Warner, the evidence of which is particularly clear in her bestselling novel *The Wide Wide World*.

Susan Warner and *The Wide Wide World*

Susan Warner was an American evangelical writer of religious fiction, children's fiction, and theological works.⁵³ She was born July 11, 1819 to New York attorney Henry Warner and his wife Anna Bartlett, who died in 1826, leaving Susan and her younger sister Anna in the care of Henry's sister, Frances Warner. Despite the absence of her mother, Warner enjoyed a fashionable New York upbringing, living in luxurious townhouses, attending lavish parties, and receiving a genteel education of her father's design. She read voraciously in the works of Sir Walter Scott and Jane Austen (Williams, "Widening" 571) and is reported to have responded emotionally to the works of Hannah More (Weiss 452), indicating an early exposure to religious tractarianism. Her father's financial stability declined precipitously in the economic Panic of 1837, and the family moved permanently to its summer home on Constitution Island, across the Hudson River from West Point Military Academy.

In 1841, Susan and Anna joined Mercer Street Chapel, drawn by the intellectual fervor of the Rev. Thomas Harvey Skinner, who later joined the faculty of Union

⁵³ Detailed, book length biographies of Susan Warner include the hagiographic account by her sister Anna published in 1909 and critical biographies covering both sisters by Dorothy Sanderson (*They Wrote for a Living: A Bibliography of the Works of Susan Bogert Warner and Anna Bartlett Warner*, 1976) and Edward Foster (*Susan and Anna Warner*, 1978).

Theological Seminary. Mercer Street was an evangelical Presbyterian congregation that emphasized conversion and faith over doctrine (E. Foster 28). In the biography of her sister, Anna attributed Susan's desire to join to her anguish over her growing isolation and sense of social inferiority (Weiss 453). Warner's distress mirrors the anguish characteristic of the nineteenth century's larger quest for community. Just as the changing economic landscape disrupted the insular sense of community enjoyed by many white Americans in the nineteenth century, so, too, did Warner's family experience increasing isolation as the result of their changing economic situation. Regardless of her motivation for conversion, the remainder of Susan Warner's life was characterized by a close identification with the evangelical mission.

A bankruptcy action brought against her father in 1848 required the sale of the family's remaining luxury items and motivated Susan to begin a draft of *The Wide Wide World*. The financial constraints that prompted her to write remained the primary impetus throughout her prolific career (Williams, "Widening" 565). Though the manuscript was initially rejected by a number of publishing houses, eliciting from a *Harpers* reviewer the monosyllabic judgment, "Fudge," G.P. Putnam published 750 copies as a Christmas book in December 1850 at the urging of his mother (Williams, "Widening" 566-567). Published under the pseudonym "Elizabeth Wetherell," *The Wide Wide World* met immediate acclaim, with positive reviews praising the author's ability to present Christianity as a fact of experience and to make religious habits of mind both natural and attractive.

Warner experienced great success with evangelical audiences, and she was labeled a religious novelist by contemporary reviewers. One of the earliest orders for the

two-volume work was a request for forty copies for use by a Baptist Sunday School in Providence, Rhode Island. Missionaries in Minnesota and China also used the novel in their schools (Williams, "Widening" 574), and clergy lauded the author's definition of Christianity that emphasized service to those in need and other positive action on society's behalf. However, it seems clear that the appeal of *The Wide Wide World* was not limited to preachers, teachers, and missionaries, for the novel was enormously successful in its time. In its first two years, the novel underwent thirteen editions (M. D. Bell 80). Within three years of its initial publication, the novel had gone through twenty-two editions, and there have been at least 130 editions of the work to date (Williams, "Widening" 567). Warner's novel remained in print continuously for eighty years after its first appearance and has appeared in at least seven languages. By 1947, *The Wide Wide World* had sold over half a million copies in the United States alone (M. D. Bell 80).⁵⁴ In its first two years of publication, the novel outsold all previous novels by American authors (80).

Though Warner never again achieved the remarkable success of her first novel, she remained an economically viable author while maintaining her ties to evangelicalism. Over the course of her life, she penned more than eighty-five novels, short stories, essays, biographies, and religious tracts numbering well over eight hundred editions (Williams, "Widening" 567; Sanderson 1). Additionally, she is the author of many well-known Christian children's songs, including the popular "Jesus Bids Us Shine" (1868).⁵⁵ For

⁵⁴ This figure does not take into account the vast number of foreign copies, primarily of British origin, which appeared almost immediately, ignoring copyright laws, and from which Warner never received royalties.

⁵⁵ Susan's sister, Anna, authored the first verse of the famous children's song "Jesus Loves Me" (1860). Interestingly, Anna wrote the song at her sister's request for a scene in Susan's novel *Say and Seal* (1860) in which a Sunday School teacher sings the song to a dying child.

this famous song, Susan Warner receives mention in the 1906 ATS book *The Story of the Hymns and Tunes*, along with her sister Anna, as “joint authors of *The Wide World* [sic], *Queechy*, and a numerous succession of healthful romances very popular in the middle and later years of the last century” (Brown and Butterworth 418). Warner’s connection to the evangelical societies is further evidenced by her contribution to the catalog of the American Sunday-School Union. The titles of her tracts indicate similar narrative content to those that appear on ATS publication lists: *The Children of Blackberry Hollow* (1861), *The Golden Ladder: Stories Illustrative of the Eight Beatitudes*, republished as *The Two School Girls and Other Tales* (1862), and *The Little Nurse of Cape Cod* (1863).

Warner switched her religious affiliation to Methodism in the mid-1860s at the urging of her friends. Though her denominational ties changed, she maintained an unwavering commitment to evangelicalism in general throughout her life. After her father’s death in 1875, Susan, Anna, and their aunt Frances took up residence north of West Point, further strengthening the ties between the Warners and the Military Academy where Susan began Bible study sessions with small groups of officers’ wives. Soon after, the increasing popularity of these sessions led to regular meetings with cadets in the Academy’s Cadet Chapel (Weiss 455). In the summer months, these meetings took place on the Warners’ lawn where young men and women gathered for Biblical exegesis and doctrinal debate. This religious instruction and her continued literary output continued until Susan’s death of a stroke in 1885, after which she was buried in the military cemetery at West Point. Warner’s strong connection to West Point increases the likelihood that she would have been familiar with the ATS: the Society has awarded specially-printed, leather-bound Bibles to the cadets at the Military Academy annually

since 1869. For the first fifty-four years, the ATS awarded the Bibles to graduating cadets, but since 1928, all incoming cadets, or “Plebes,” have received this gift of scripture.

Through Warner’s associations with other evangelical publishers and her missionary work with West Point, the author was likely aware of the American Tract Society, its publications, and its mission. A close look at the death of Alice Humphreys in Warner’s *The Wide Wide World* further evidences Warner’s familiarity with the evangelical publishers by revealing the characteristics of the Society’s evangelized version of death in the novel’s death scene.

Like her dying ATS predecessors, Alice expresses a confident readiness to die, regards heaven as her true home, and uses her dying days to exhort those who form a loving community around her, encouraging them to prepare for a reunion with her in heaven. The bulk of the novel deals with the travails of young Ellen Montgomery, on whom most critical attention has focused.⁵⁶ However, an important section of the work relates the influence of the delicate, ethereal Alice on the upbringing of the motherless Ellen—an influence on which relatively few scholars focus. Even fewer meditate on the significance of Alice’s death. While Claire Chantell and Veronica Stewart discuss Alice as a surrogate mother for Ellen, for example, neither provides much treatment of her death. But Alice’s death is particularly useful for what it reveals about the evangelical influences on Warner’s text.

⁵⁶ Frequently, the terms of this treatment are the traditional ones of subversion and submission, with the focus of the examination on the central character of Ellen Montgomery. Erika Bauermeister takes just this approach in her analysis of Ellen’s submissiveness to authority. Cindy Weinstein continues this discussion with her treatment of Ellen as a slave in the novel (12), and Catharine O’Connell focuses on female suffering and the patriarchy, again with an emphasis on Ellen. Maintaining this focus in *Sensational Designs*, Jane Tompkins regards the novel as a type of *bildungsroman*, with Ellen as the central, maturing character.

Alice, a minister's daughter, befriends Ellen after the younger girl is left with her crotchety Aunt Fortune when her parents move to Europe to mend her mother's failing health. Though Ellen is hard-pressed to maintain an optimistic attitude during her time with her ironically-named relative, Alice offers spiritual guidance and support that enables Ellen to maintain her godly outlook. From the first moment that Alice appears to Ellen, her words bring comfort and Christian counsel. As Ellen lies weeping on a hillside after yet another run-in with her aunt, Alice appears suddenly, almost miraculously, in this remote setting and greets Ellen with the words, "What is the matter, my child" (148). After Ellen responds that no one can help her with her problems, Alice offers the first of many spiritual lessons: "There's one in heaven that can. . . . Nothing is too bad for him to mend. Have you asked *his* help, Ellen" (150). Alice's spiritual insights and counsel echo the divine wisdom of the tracts' dying children. Linda Naranjo-Huebl regards Alice as a Christlike priestly mediator between Ellen and God (599), and though she examines Alice's death, her discussion only addresses the ways in which that death marks Ellen's full entry into religious faith. By contrast with Naranjo-Huebl, I would argue that Alice's death is more significant for what that scene evidences about evangelicalism's influence on its author.

Alice's influence is felt even more strongly on the ten-year-old girl when she moves in with Alice after receiving the news of her mother's death. Unfortunately, Alice soon falls victim to an undisclosed malady, and Ellen fills the role of nursemaid for her dying mentor. After a period of time, Alice's condition worsens dramatically, and her end draws near. She painstakingly reveals this development to Ellen in language that echoes the sentimental tracts:

“Suppose Ellie,” she said at length,—“that you and I were taking a journey together—a troublesome dangerous journey—and that *I* had a way of getting at once safe to the end of it;—would you be willing to let me go, and you do without me for the rest of the way?” (426)

Ellen expresses concern, but Alice continues, “I think I am going home, Ellie,—before you. . . . Home I feel it to be; it is not a strange land; I thank God it is my home I am going to” (426). Just as Catharine Helfenstein declares “Oh, I am going home to him—I am going to glory” (13), so, too, does Alice rely on this characterization of heaven as home to comfort herself and those around her.

Ellen cannot bear to consider that Alice’s death may be eminent, but she does suddenly realize that Alice’s appearance has grown similar to that of Ellen’s mother in her last days. The child’s grief is great, but Alice offers spiritual instruction in scriptural language even in the face of her own death; “We must say ‘the Lord’s will be done;’ . . . the hand that is taking me away is one that will touch neither of us but to do us good” (427, quoting Acts 21.14). Like the children in the tracts, Alice echoes the confidence of the orphaned title character of the ATS’s *Margaret* that “he knows what is best for me” (13). Though the world is beautiful, Alice declares, she will not find it hard to leave behind, for “I know heaven is a great deal more lovely” (431). Alice is greatly attached to Ellen, her brother, and her father, but she does not hesitate when given the hypothetical choice to stay: “I enjoy all this, and I love you all,—but I can leave it and can leave you,—yes, both,—for I would see Jesus” (433). Alice’s willingness to forego the world for an opportunity to be with her savior parallels Little Ann’s profession that “she loved [Jesus Christ] and longed to depart to be with him” (9).

Alice's spiritual-mindedness is not the only echo of a dying character from the ATS publications. From her deathbed, Alice exhorts the household servant, Sophia, in a scene reminiscent of *Catharine Helfenstein* and others: "I have taken all my good deeds and all my bad, and have cast them together in a heap before the Lord; and from them all I have fled to Jesus Christ, and in him alone I have sweet peace" (436). Sophia admires the serenity with which Alice anticipates death and expresses a desire to be more like her. As does the protagonist in each of the tracts, Alice uses this teachable moment to share the gospel, confessing her own sinfulness and claiming the saving power of Jesus' sacrifice. Sophia is convicted of the condition of her soul and bursts into tears; "I suppose you are right; but I don't understand it," she weeps to her employer (436).

Warner's account of Alice's death further evidences the influence of evangelicalism through its inclusion of hymns. From Alice's request for Ellen to sing "How Firm a Foundation" (433) to her contemplation of lines from "O Happy Soul that Lives on High" (436) to Ellen's star-gazing recital of "Ye Golden Lamps of Heaven, Farewell" (439), the hymns in the novel serve much the same purpose as those in the tracts.⁵⁷ The inclusion of hymns encourages those that call them to mind, evidences the spirituality of the characters, and lends spiritual authority to the message being conveyed.

Alice's health declines rapidly, and her days grow short. Calling Ellen to her bedside, Alice discloses, "I think the messenger has come for me" (438). Regarding heaven being her destination, i.e., her eternal security, Alice continues, "I am sure of it, Ellie; I have no doubt of it;--so don't cry for me." Like the children of the tracts, Alice

⁵⁷ "How Firm a Foundation" is attributed to John Rippon (1751-1836), a Baptist minister and hymnologist. "O Happy Soul that Lives on High" is Watts's "Hymn 2.31," and "Ye Golden Lamps of Heaven, Farewell" was written by Philip Doddridge (1702-1751), an English Nonconformist minister and author.

exhibits a confidence that is markedly different from the attitude portrayed by the fallen women of the early novels.

After describing herself as “perfectly happy,” Alice expires: “Alice was gone; but the departing spirit had left a ray of brightness on its earthly house; there was a half smile on the sweet face, of most entire peace and satisfaction” (441). Evoking the imagery of Little Ann, whose “happy spirit . . . escaped the prison of the body” (32), and the language of the orphaned title character of *Margaret*, whose last words characterize her as “quite happy” (16), Alice’s death scene is permeated with the language of ATS-style evangelicalism. Like the authors of the tracts, Warner creates a death scene in which the dying character is not contorted by agonal breathing or the guilt pangs characteristic of the early novels’ fallen women, but instead enjoys a sweet peaceful transference to heaven on angelic wings.

Alice’s brother, John, offers a final comment that encapsulates one of the main messages of Warner’s novel, and by extension, the message of the ATS: “Think that sweetly and easily she has got home; and it is our home too. . . . Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord” (444, quoting Rev. 14.13). Though the message is slightly different, the use of scriptural language is not. The ATS’s tracts encouraged readers to compare their spiritual condition to that of little children through the inclusion of the *puer senex*. Warner seems to adjust the message to an adult audience through her portrayal of the death of an adult female, but the exhortation to consider the condition of one’s soul is the same. Despite her age, Alice is no more like the fallen women of the early novels than is Catharine Helfenstein. Instead, Alice is similar to the children of the ATS in an extremely important way, her purity of spirit. She has not been initiated into the

sexualized world of adulthood and thereby maintains an important connection to the dying children of the ATS. Thus, the message of Alice's death is much the same as that of the ATS's children; only by dying "in the Lord" will the deceased receive the reward of heaven.

That Warner's novel had a profound impact on its audience seems clear. A young Austrian couple sent the author a photograph of their recently deceased daughter with the following note: "The last earthly wish of our dear Maria was to have another of your works—She is no more and she is gone where she sees clearly what you brought to her mind" (qtd. in Williams, "Widening" 574). These mournful comments evidence the powerful tool forged by the fusion of evangelicalism and sentimentalism, a tool that provided grieving parents with a mechanism for tempering loss with a hopeful view of eternity. The number of similarities between the tracts and *The Wide Wide World* illustrate the influence of evangelicalism on Warner's portrayal of death, an influence potentially exerted through the works of the evangelical publishing houses like the ATS. Though Warner likely had contact with the ATS and its influence seems obvious in her bestselling novel, Harriet Beecher Stowe, the biggest selling author of the nineteenth century, has documented connections to the Society. Consequently, the death scenes of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* offer the clearest evidence of the evangelical influence on the bestselling authors of the mid-nineteenth century.

Harriet Beecher Stowe and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Harriet Beecher Stowe's biography evidences her lifelong connection to evangelicalism.⁵⁸ Born in 1811 in Litchfield, Connecticut, Harriet Beecher Stowe was

⁵⁸ As might be expected, numerous biographies of Stowe exist, ranging from 1889's *The Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe: Compiled from her Letters and Journals* by her son Charles Edward Stowe to 1994's

the seventh child of Congregationalist minister Lyman Beecher and his wife, Roxana Foote Beecher, who died from tuberculosis when Harriet was five. As a result, Stowe, like Susan Warner, found herself in the care of her aunt: Lyman's half sister, Esther Beecher, moved in and assumed the care of the household (Knight 406). Stowe grew up in an environment of New England Congregational piety that emanated from a family of preachers, and she maintained a maternal connection to the Episcopal faith through her mother's family (Gatta 412). Consequently, she developed an early interest in theology and in schemes for the improvement of society. At a young age, she formulated her lifelong belief in the importance of faith in action, a belief that, like Warner's, predisposed the author in favor of the evangelical societies.

As a child, Stowe read voraciously and exhibited a natural talent for writing. By age nine, she was writing weekly essays, and her earliest existing composition dates to age twelve. Her essay entitled "Can the Immortality of the Soul Be Proved by the Light of Nature?" was selected for presentation to a school assembly as an example of model student work. By 1833, Stowe was an active member of the Semi-Colon Club, a literary group devoted to intellectual discussions of society, literature, education, and religion (Knight 407). In 1836, she married Calvin Ellis Stowe, a clergyman, and with his encouragement, she continued to write. She published frequently in periodicals such as *Godey's Lady's Book* and the *New-York Evangelist*. In 1843, she published her first book of fiction, *The Mayflower; or, Sketches of Scenes and Characters among the Descendants of the Puritans*. The book was a critical and commercial failure, at least by contrast with her next novel.

Pulitzer Prize-winning *Harriet Beecher Stowe: A Life* (1994) by Joan Hedrick, which is the main scholarly biography.

Calvin Stowe obtained a position with Bowdoin College in 1850, and it was there, in Brunswick, Maine, that Harriet Beecher Stowe penned her bestselling novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Though Stowe's strong Christian convictions and long-held belief in active Christian service fueled abolitionist sympathies, the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act provided the final impetus for the novel's creation. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe attempts to remind readers that Christianity is incompatible with a social system that allows slavery. Throughout her life, Stowe insisted that God was the author of the novel; she was simply the instrument through which he spoke (Knight 408). Though *Uncle Tom's Cabin* initially appeared serially in the *National Era* (410), its publication by John P. Jewett in 1852 propelled Stowe into the public eye and made her an international celebrity.

It is difficult to accurately gauge the enormous immediate and long-term impact of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. By the end of 1852, the book had sold 305,000 copies in the United States (Williams, "Promoting" 181) and over a million in England (Donovan 11). By 1857, 500,000 copies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had been sold, and it continued to sell at the rate of 1,000 a week (M. D. Bell 80). The novel inspired both board games and stage adaptations, and by the mid-1970s, it had been translated into fifty-eight languages (Knight 410). One gauge of its influence is the comment long attributed apocryphally to Abraham Lincoln upon his introduction to Stowe: "So you're the little woman who wrote the book that made this great war" (C. Stowe 203).⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Though this quotation is always attributed to Abraham Lincoln and oft reprinted by a wide variety of sources, it is typically prefaced with words such as "reportedly" or "supposedly." The reason for this equivocation is the existence of Charles Stowe's biography of his mother as the quotation's sole recording source. Written and published fifteen years after Harriet's death, the book recounts the conversation based solely on Charles's recollection of the event which occurred forty-nine years prior to publication.

As with Susan Warner and Maria Cummins, Stowe's subsequent novels failed to achieve the phenomenal success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Nevertheless, her writing career was long and prolific, spanning fifty-one years and more than thirty books, including another antislavery novel (*Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp*, 1856), a "fictionalized biography" (*The Pearl of Orr's Island*, 1862), and a romance with theological overtones (*The Minister's Wooing*, 1859) (Hedrick 297). The author died at age 85 at Nook Farm in Hartford, Connecticut and is buried in the Chapel Cemetery at Andover Theological Seminary (Knight 408).

Harriet Beecher Stowe's connection to the American Tract Society is even more explicit than that of Susan Warner's. Evidence indicates that Stowe had an early acquaintance with the Society, as a connection existed between it and her family as early as 1816. In the Society's "Second Report," dated May 27, 1816, the committee notes the publication of tract number 70, *On the Importance of Educating Young Men for Ministry*, by the Rev. Lyman Beecher, D.D. ("Proceedings" 31). An 1849 listing of the tracts includes *To Those Commencing a Religious Life*, which is "ascribed to Miss Catherine E. Beecher" (*Sketch* 14). Furthermore, Harriet Beecher Stowe herself published works with the ATS. In 1852, the Society printed *Earthly Care: A Heavenly Discipline*, which was republished in 1853 in the collection *Uncle Sam's Emancipation: Earthly Care, a Heavenly Discipline, and Other Sketches*. In 1858, the ATS printed and distributed Stowe's *He's Coming Tomorrow*.

In their source studies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, both Theodore Hovet and Rita Smith further link Stowe to the evangelical publishers. Hovet makes the connection to the character of Uncle Tom. In *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe writes, "A small

religious tract, containing an account of [Phebe Ann Jacobs's] life, was published by the American Tract Society, prepared by a lady of Brunswick. The writer recollects . . . reading the tract" (418). Hovet identifies the tract mentioned by Stowe as "The Narrative of Phebe Ann Jacobs" an undated publication of the ATS that Stowe claims to have read in 1850 (267). He also identifies the "lady of Brunswick" and tract author as Mrs. T. C. Upham, the wife of Calvin Stowe's Bowdoin colleague, Thomas C. Upham (268). He reveals further that Harriet "stayed with [the Uphams] for several days while a home in Brunswick was prepared for the Stowe family" in 1850, "less than a year before composing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" (268).

Rita Smith makes the connection between evangelical tracts and the character of Eva St. Clare, arguing that the "memoir of the dying child" serves as a generic source for Eva's death (314). Specifically, Smith links Eva's death scene to Mary Martha Sherwood's *Little Henry and His Bearer* (314). Though originally an English publication, the Society began publishing copies of this popular memoir as early as 1814.⁶⁰ Smith notes the similarities between the two stories, including the unexpected illness, the distribution of hair, the embrace of death, the exhortation, the singing of hymns, and the community of loved ones present at death. Smith further notes the similarity in the relationships between Eva and Tom and Henry and Boosey, little Henry's "bearer" (316). Hovet's and Smith's detailed source studies strongly suggest that Stowe had a knowledge of the ATS through her regular exposure to both the Society's authors and its publications.

⁶⁰ This connection is not noted by Smith's article though the Society was the likely source for Stowe's exposure to the memoir.

Though many aspects of Alice's death in Warner's novel echo elements of the Tract Society's publications, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* seems to be even more obviously influenced by the ATS's work. Though a significant amount of criticism focuses on the meaning of the deaths of both Uncle Tom and Little Eva, few scholars choose to examine the origins of Stowe's death scenes. A close examination suggests that the origins of those scenes lie in the ATS's reinterpretation of the sentimental deathbed scene, and Stowe's novel has been linked to at least two ATS tracts. As Hovet has illustrated, the character of Uncle Tom appears to be based on the ATS character of "Happy Phebe," and Smith makes a solid case for "Little Henry and His Bearer" as a source for Little Eva. Another likely source for the death scenes of Eva St. Clare and Uncle Tom is Catharine Helfenstein in the ATS tract of the same name.

Though Eva St. Clare dies before Uncle Tom in Stowe's novel, I will cover these scenes in reverse order since Little Eva's death reflects even more clearly the ATS's influence than does the death of Uncle Tom. Despite some apparent differences, the death of Uncle Tom exhibits most of the characteristics established by the ATS. Tom views heaven as a resting place, and he expresses great confidence in Jesus's power to save his soul. He calls heaven his home, using scriptural language throughout, and he longs to go there. Tom shares Eva's willingness to die, like Christ, for the sins of those around him. At the end, Tom tries to convert his listeners through exhortation, and his final words call to mind his heavenly destination.

Though Tom's status as a black male is a seemingly radical departure from the ATS formula, critical scholarship would argue that Stowe's characterization is not all that different than Warner's characterization of Alice or the ATS's characterization of it dying

children. Both Elizabeth Ammons and Theodore Hovet, for example, identify Tom as a “true woman.” Ammons contends that Tom is a heroine because he embodies the feminine/domestic ideals. Hovet concurs with this estimation and, as earlier noted, identifies a female slave as a potential source for Stowe’s creation of Uncle Tom. Isabelle White echoes this analysis with her characterization of Tom as the “ideal woman” (108). Indeed, Tom’s femininity, his apparent understanding of divine things, and his childlike sympathies render him strikingly similar to the *puer senex* of the ATS’s tracts.

When the reader joins Tom on Legree’s plantation, the southern terminus of his slave journey, Tom has been called from the fields to provide his master with information regarding the whereabouts of the fugitive slaves. Tom understands the likely fatal outcome of this meeting, but he experiences the same confidence as the tracts’ protagonists regarding his impending demise: he “felt strong in God to meet death” (357). Before going to meet Legree, Tom turns his eyes to heaven and utters Christ’s words on the cross: “Into thy hands I commend my spirit! Thou hast redeemed me, oh Lord God of truth” (357, quoting Luke 23.46). In response to his cry, Tom hears in his soul a voice from heaven that reassures him. Reflecting the evangelical characterization of heaven as home, Stowe writes that “his soul throbbed, —his home was in sight, —and the hour of release seemed at hand” (357).

Tom refuses to tell Legree the information that he desires. Legree promises to kill him, but Tom is unmoved. He confesses that he would give Legree every drop of his blood if he thought it would save his master’s soul. Following the tracts’ model of

exhortation, Tom preaches to Legree, even as he is threatened by the man; “My troubles’ll be over soon; but, if ye don’t repent, yours won’t never end” (358).

Legree orders Tom whipped, and the narrator evidences the evangelical influence when she likens Tom’s sufferings to those of Christ. Jesus appears to Tom as he is being beaten to death; “There stood by him ONE,—seen by him alone,—‘like unto the Son of God’” (359, quoting Heb. 7.3). This presence gives Tom renewed courage, and he cries out in a weak voice that he forgives his persecutors. Even as he faints away toward death, Tom follows the evangelistic compulsion established by the tracts’ protagonists when he summons the energy to preach the gospel to Sambo and Quimbo in a “few energetic sentences of that wondrous One,—his life, his death, his everlasting presence, and power to save” (359). Tom’s dying efforts are repaid as the narrator reassures the reader that Tom’s prayer for the souls of his two persecutors has been answered with their conversion.

Tom, like Eva and the characters of the ATS, wields a powerful influence. After his beating, he is ministered to by the various slaves of Legree’s plantation, who form a surrogate community in the absence of Tom’s family and loved ones until George Shelby arrives. As Mary Louise Kete has noted, the sentimental bonds formed in this collective act of mourning Tom’s coming death make him a part of a larger community. All remember the small kindnesses that Tom has shown them whenever it has been in his power to do so. On his deathbed, he is bathed by “tears of late repentance in the poor, ignorant heathen, whom his dying love and patience had awakened to repentance” (361). Thus, Tom, like the ATS’s dying characters, is surrounded by a community of those who love him, even though it does not include his family and those he holds most dear.

However, it is this absence of relatives that contributes to the tragic aspects of Tom's death. Though Tom experiences a "good" communal death, slavery denies him a familial death. Like the ATS characters, Tom is provided with an opportunity to witness to the community that does surround him, and Tom's example and joy in the face of death move those around him to repentance and conversion to Jesus.

Tom's dying scene occurs when George Shelby finally discovers Tom's location. When he appears to Tom, the slave is greatly relieved to see his former master, and Tom murmurs a few lines of a hymn: "Jesus can make a dying-bed / Feel soft as downy pillows are" (362). Interestingly, and I contend not coincidentally, Tom utters the same lines from Watts's "Christ's Presence Makes Death Easy" voiced by Catharine Helfenstein over twenty years earlier. Tom reveals that this reunion is all that has kept him from dying with complete contentment. Now that he has seen George, he is ready to go home. George protests that Tom cannot die; he has come to take him home to Kentucky with him. Tom replies, "Mas'r George, ye're too late. The Lord's bought me, and is going to take me home, —and I long to go. Heaven is better than Kintuck" (362).

George begs him not to die, calling him a poor fellow and expressing great grief over his imminent demise. Tom, echoing the protests of the ATS characters, rebuffs his former master:

Don't call me poor fellow! . . . I *have* been poor fellow; but that's all past and gone, now. I'm right in the door, going into glory! O, Mas'r George! *Heaven has come!* I've got the victory!—the Lord Jesus has given it to me! Glory be to His name! (362)

Like the characters that have gone before him, Tom counts himself lucky to be moving on from this life into his heavenly reward. Tom's attitude toward death is even more striking in light of the torturous death that he endures. Despite having been beaten relentlessly at Legree's command, Tom urges George not to seek vengeance on the demonic slaveholder, saying "He an't done me no real harm, —only opened the gate of the kingdom for me; that's all" (363).

With George present as a representative of Tom's real earthly community, the dying slave further exhorts his family and friends.

And oh, the poor chil'en, and the baby! . . . Tell 'em all to follow me—follow me!
 . . . 'Pears like I loves 'em all! I loves every creatur' everywhar!—it's nothing but
 love! O, Mas'r George! What a thing 't is to be a Christian! (363)

After this exhortation and declaration of Christian faith, Stowe continues to follow the ATS model with her description of Tom's transformation. Just like Emma, Eliza, Catharine, and Margaret, Tom undergoes the "change" that marks the beginning of his translation into the divine realm: "That mysterious and sublime change passed over his face, that told the approach of other worlds" (363).

Tom's final words from scripture bear testimony to the depth of his spiritual beliefs. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" he asks with his dying breath (363, quoting Rom. 8.35). Like the final words of many of the ATS protagonists, Tom's last utterance provides the reader with a glimpse of the glory beyond the grave. As his predecessors have, Tom dies with a smile on his face. Unlike his predecessors, Tom endures horrific torture and abuse, yet he resolutely maintains his spiritual perspective. George is so transfixed by Tom's serenity and composure that he remarks in awe, "What

a thing it is to be a Christian!” Not only are George’s words reminiscent of John’s at the death of Alice in *The Wide Wide World*, but they echo the postmortem musings of countless ATS characters who have witnessed the deaths of little saints. Though Tom is an adult black male rather than a young white female, a distinction reflective of Stowe’s abolitionist agenda, the characteristics of his death align him closely with the dying *puer senex* of the tracts.

Though Tom’s death resembles that of the ATS’s young girls, the death of Eva St. Clare represents one of the most significant pieces of evidence to further support the direct influence of the ATS on Harriet Beecher Stowe. Bridget Bennett observes that Eva’s death has “innumerable precedents” and is “by no means innovative” (3). Of particular interest in terms of derivation is the close correlation between the deaths of Eva and Catharine Helfenstein. Like her ATS predecessors, Evangeline St. Clare suffers a rapidly progressing illness. Her health briefly rallies, but this is short-lived and produces false hope. Throughout the duration of her illness, Eva offers wise spiritual counsel to those around her. She focuses her thoughts on spiritual matters, enjoying scripture and singing hymns. Just like the characters in the tracts, Eva views death as a homecoming, and she declares her preference for death over life. Her only hesitation concerns the sorrow of those she will leave behind and the condition of their souls. Like the children in the tracts, Eva is described in increasingly angelic terms as her connection to her earthly body becomes progressively more tenuous. She distributes her possessions to her family and friends, both white and black, and she uses her last moments to exhort the collected audience concerning the condition of their souls. Finally, Eva’s last words

indicate a deeper spiritual understanding that allows her to embrace death as a triumphant ending to a virtuous life.

Though Rita Smith notes the similarities between Eva and the ATS's "little Henry," Eva's death seems to particularly echo that of Catharine Helfenstein. Both characters exemplify the evangelical use of the *puer senex*. Catharine is notable for her "attachment to divine things" and for being "an exemplary scholar," so much so that she is appointed as "a teacher in the Sabbath-school" (10). Eva exhibits this same sort of precocity; "Eva was an uncommonly mature child" (239). Her wisdom and maturity are remarked upon by her aunt Ophelia: "She's no more than Christlike. . . . She might teach me a lesson" (246). Eva's father responds, "It wouldn't be the first time a little child had been used to instruct an old disciple" (246), echoing Isaiah's messianic prophecy that "a little child shall lead them" (Isa. 11.6). Ophelia is not the only observer to comment on the similarities between Eva and Christ. Denise Knight, Thomas Steele, and Isabelle White have noted the clear parallels between the story's dying characters and Christ. Knight observes that Eva and Tom are allegorical figures (409), and Steele contends that Eva resembles "the Christ of the Last Discourse in St. John's gospel" (85). Just as the witnesses to Catharine's life and death receive a lesson in the proper condition of the soul, so, too, do those that surround Eva.

Like Catharine, Eva experiences an illness, most likely consumption, which is quick in its progression. Stowe notes that Eva's health "began to fail rapidly" (237). She suffers from a cough, shortness of breath, and night sweats. Eva and Catharine share another interesting plot element; both are cared for by their aunts. Given the high maternal death rate of the day, this is not an atypical arrangement, but the coincidence is

nevertheless worth noting. Catharine is sent to “spend the summer with her relatives” (11), and it is “her aunt” that the reader finds “sitting by her bed” (13). In the same way, Eva’s Aunt Ophelia is reported to “day and night [perform] the duties of a nurse” (253). After a week or two of this decline, Eva briefly rallies, but this is “one of those deceitful lulls, by which her inexorable disease so often beguiles the anxious heart, even on the verge of the grave” (239).

Despite her inevitable death, Eva remains light-hearted and excited. Because her focus is on her heavenly reward, Eva has “no regret for herself in dying” (239). Like her predecessors, Eva takes comfort from her knowledge of Jesus as one who particularly welcomed little children. Speaking of Jesus, Stowe writes “He had ceased to be an image and a picture of the distant past, and come to be a living, all-surrounding reality.” Like Catharine’s claim that she is “going home to him” (13), Eva takes comfort in the fact that “to Him . . . she was going, and to his home.” Later, when her father asks her where she is going, Eva responds, “To our Saviour’s home; it’s so sweet and peaceful there—it is all so loving there” (242). Eva again employs the evangelical characterization of heaven as home in her response to her father.

Tom observes Eva’s declining health and her increasingly tenuous grasp on mortality. “It’s jest no use tryin’ to keep Miss Eva here,” he remarks; “She’s got the Lord’s mark in her forehead” (240), referring to the apostle John’s vision of a seal given to God’s servants (Rev. 7.3). She is further described as being “a soul half loosed from its earthly bonds” (250). Her angelic appearance is emphasized by Stowe: “It was late in the afternoon, and the rays of the sun formed a kind of glory behind her, as she came forward in her white dress, with her golden hair and glowing cheeks, her eyes unnaturally

bright with the slow fever that burned in her veins" (240). Leslie Fiedler comments on this angelic aspect of Eva in his seminal text, *Love and Death in the American Novel*. He identifies Eva as the "safe safe heroine" (267), whose death prevents her image of purity from becoming sullied. Though Fiedler is more interested in the sexuality of Eva's death, his examination does note the pure, angelic appearance of Eva that concerns this project. This same sort of increasing ethereality is modeled by Catharine as she is "doubtless ripening for glory" (11).

Eva, like Catharine, expresses a preference for death. Just as Catharine rebukes the Rev. Mr. E after his prayer for her health, so Eva corrects her father when he declares that she seems to be improving. "I am not any better, . . . and I am going, before long . . . I want to go, —I long to go" (241). She makes clear what her preference is. Her confidence in her savior is such that any further delay is a nuisance. She lingers only for the sake of those that will miss her when she is gone.

From this moment forth, Eva's end seems inevitable. As her name Evangeline suggests, she bears testimony to those who will listen. Taken from the Greek name for the Gospels, "*euangelion*," the name "Evangeline" literally means "messenger of good news," and it is the nature of Stowe's young character to use her remaining time to exhort those around her. She begins with her father, describing her "Saviour's home" in an attempt to persuade him to change his ways. He is reminded of his mother's hymns and prayers that he heard in his youth.

In a scene that seems suggested by, though is not fully developed in, *Catharine Helfenstein*, Eva next intercedes with the much maligned Topsy. In the tract, Catharine "desired that her love should be tendered" to the "colored girl living at her father's house,

and whom she had been in the habit of instructing" (15).⁶¹ Eva's interaction with Topsy evidences many of the same characteristics. Eva has been instructing the young slave girl in spiritual matters; "O, Topsy, poor child, I love you! . . . I love you, and I want you to be good" (245). Eva urges her to be good for her sake since she will not be with her long. Stowe records,

In that moment, a ray of real belief...had penetrated the darkness of [Topsy's] heathen soul...while the beautiful child, bending over her, looked like the picture of some bright angel stooping to reclaim a sinner. (245)

Finally, Eva turns her evangelical intentions on the gathered slaves. She tells her father that she needs to address the slaves; "I want to see all our people together. I have some things I *must* say to them" (250). The things that she must say include a profession of love for "her dear friends" and an exhortation for them to put their trust in Jesus. Only by doing so will they join her in heaven.

Her message of hope and love is essentially the same as Catharine's. The tract's protagonist preaches, "If there be any here that have not experienced religion, let them pray; for Jesus is here, and he will bless them" (15). Eva echoes this message, saying "If you want to be Christian, Jesus will help you. You must pray to him" (251). Catharine's exhortation to "meet her in heaven" (14) establishes the language used by Eva, who encourages her listeners to "Think that I loved you and am gone to heaven, and that I want to see you all there" (251).

⁶¹ This reference to the "colored girl" in *Catharine Helfenstein* is likely the "tip of the iceberg" that might be revealed through an examination of the Society's involvement in abolitionism, and further exploration is warranted. While the dissertations of both Harvey Neufeldt and Karl Valois address this connection on some level, a more exhaustive study could reveal the complexity of the ATS's dilemma as it tried to avoid offending Southerners who might then bar evangelical access to their slave populations.

With these words, Eva expresses the evangelical desire for a restoration of community initially expressed by Catharine and the other ATS protagonists. Numerous critics have commented on the formation of community that occurs in *Uncle Tom's Cabin's* most crucial deaths. Mary Louise Kete observes that the social act of mourning creates an alternative identity of the American self as a collaborative individual. The death scenes in the novel form a community of readers that are united through the shared act of mourning. Isabelle White shares this view, insisting that the novel prevents readers from withdrawing and forces them to feel a connection with each other (103). The death scenes provide an "occasion for shared public mourning" (100). Through their deaths, Tom and Eva are absorbed into what White labels "an otherworldly community" (112). *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the ATS's tracts promise a restoration of this community after death. Though she will soon be parting from her earthly circle of loved ones, Eva exhorts them to trust Jesus so that they may be reunited in heaven. Just as Catharine "called her relatives and friends around her bed and exhorted them to meet her in heaven" (14), so, too, does Eva call her community to her bedside for an exhortation.

After this audience, Eva's decline quickens. She still enjoys hearing Tom sing hymns to her, a pastime enjoyed by both the young girl and the man throughout their friendship. Like *Catharine Helfenstein*, Stowe's novel includes excerpts from numerous hymns. Among these are at least two parallels between the tract and the novel: the aforementioned Watts hymn, "Christ's Presence Makes Death Easy" and a common hymn reference to "wings." As her death approaches, Catharine sings "O had I wings like Noah's dove" from the hymn "O That I Had Some Humble Place" (14). Though Tom employs a different hymn, he uses the same flight imagery to encourage Eva,

singing “O, had I the wings of the morning, / I’d fly away to Canaan’s shore” (226) from “O Thou Almighty Father” which appears in Henry Ward Beecher’s *Plymouth Collection of Hymns* (1856). Later, Eva is said to “lay like a wearied dove” in her father’s arms (253). This passage incorporates the scriptural language of Psalm 139.9 and the flight imagery of Psalm 55.6. Both the language and the imagery serve to emphasize the growing ethereality of these dying characters.

Eva reveals to Tom that God has sent his messenger into her soul, and Tom warns Miss Ophelia that “the bridegroom cometh” (255). Here, Stowe references the “Parable of the Ten Virgins” from Matthew 25, a key source, as I have already discussed, of the ATS’s message to its readers to “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh” (Matt. 25. 13). Tom continues with predictions about Eva’s death that echo Bunyan’s description of heaven at the conclusion of the first part of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* (153):

When that ar blessed child goes into the kingdom, they’ll open the door so wide,
we’ll all get a look in at the glory. . . . She telled me this morning, she was coming
nearer,--thar’s them that tells it to the child. . . . It’s the angels. (255)

Here again, the language of Catharine’s death scene is strikingly similar: “Angels were standing prepared to convey her departing spirit into the bosom of Abraham, and . . . they sweetly whispered, ‘Come away’” (16). With this portent announced, Eva divides up her possessions and designates the recipients among her friends in the same manner as the ATS’s Little Ann. According to Naranjo-Huebl, this scene in which Eva distributes locks of her hair evokes Christ’s Last Supper (7), an interpretation in keeping with Stowe’s portrayal of Eva’s purity.

Eva's decline culminates in her death at around midnight. As she lies taking her final breaths, the narrator notes the revealing nature of the dying child's eyes, which are rolled toward heaven: "What said those eyes, that spoke so much of heaven" (257)? Eva, like her ATS predecessors, bears a countenance of great joy, a triumphant brightness, but like Catharine, this heavenly joy is achieved only after a momentary struggle with earthly pain. About Catharine, the narrator reports that "she felt the pain of dying, but she felt its bliss also" (16). This same combination is experienced by Eva. Stowe describes "a spasm of mortal agony pass over the face," but this is followed by the announcement that "earth was past, and earthly pain, but so solemn, so mysterious, was the triumphant brightness of that face, that it checked even the sobs of sorrow" (257).

Eva's last words strike a familiar chord as well: "A bright, a glorious smile passed over her face, and she said, brokenly,—'O love,—joy—peace!' gave one sigh, and passed from death unto life!" Just as Catharine praises God at her moment of death, saying "Glory to the Lord. Hallelujah" (16), Eva's last words, too, are indicative of her heavenly perspective. She is "imparted those mysterious intimations which the soul feels, as the cords begin to unbind, ere it leaves its clay forever" (255). When Eva dies, another Christian goes home to heaven, or as *Catharine Helfenstein's* narrator similarly notes, "The golden bowl was broken, the silver cord was loosed, and her spirit returned unto God who gave it" (16, quoting Eccles. 12.6).

Both the death scenes in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the tracts provide readers with an evangelicalized version of this sentimental trope, in which death is viewed as a reward gained at the end of an earthly struggle. Both portray dying characters who look forward anxiously to their departure from this life. Each of these characters, when given the

hypothetical choice, expresses his or her preference for death over a continued life here on earth. Each character also expresses his or her complete reliance on Jesus Christ and his saving grace to deliver a soul to heaven. All of these characters attempt to minister to the community about them, using their witness and testimony to convert the souls of their audiences. Jane Tompkins views Eva's death as victorious, providing her with access to "salvific force" (*Sensational* 129). Eva shares this force with her ATS predecessors, all of whom exert a salvific influence on their communities through their deathbed exhortations and exemplary deaths. Isabelle White examines this influence and the way in which a traditionally powerless person, such as a slave or a small child, can become powerful by dying for others (103). Linda Naranjo-Huebl continues this line of thinking, arguing that the deaths of Eva and Tom redeem those around them, affirming the claims for victory made by Tompkins. The dying characters of both Stowe's novel and the ATS's tracts greet death with expressions of joy and utterances that indicate an understanding and vision of what lies in the hereafter. Stowe's novel evidences the influence of the ATS, particularly of the tract *Catherine Helfenstein*, on its portrayal of death, and the novel's central themes of redemption and salvation are rooted in the forms established by the ATS.

By the mid-nineteenth century, a generic format for that most sentimental of motifs, the deathbed scene, had become firmly established. So conventional was this portrayal of death that one could find much the same scene in any of the bestselling novels of Maria Cummins, Susan Warner, and Harriet Stowe. In these novels, the dying characters rely on an evangelicalized theology that allows them to happily embrace death as a part of God's will for their lives. The characterization of heaven as home makes this

embrace far more palatable, allowing the dying characters to anticipate the restoration of their community of friends and family after death. But, this anticipated reunion can only take place if the survivors heed the gospel call. Thus, the dying characters exhort the earthly community surrounding them to follow in their footsteps through obedience to Jesus.

However, this conventional scene is sharply different than the death scenes in the pre-1800 novels of Brown, Rowson, and Foster, despite the fact that all six authors are routinely categorized as practitioners of American literary sentimentalism. These early texts create scenarios in which their dying women face death as a punishment to be experienced in isolation from their friends and family. The message imparted by these early writers is that the “wages of sin is death,” a message replaced with the evangelical belief of “blessed are those that die in the Lord” in the mid-century bestsellers.

Though there is a seeming discontinuity in the American sentimental tradition between the beginning and midpoint of the nineteenth century, this rupture is explained in part by the intervention of the ATS into the historical evolution of the genre. Responding to changes in theology, economics, and politics, evangelicals began a campaign to convert the nation and thus bring about the millennial reign of Christ. In order to effect this mass conversion, the ATS pioneered the nation’s first mass media, embracing technological advances and adopting and adapting the nation’s most popular literary genre, sentimentalism. Inseparably fusing sentimentalism with evangelicalism, the Society blanketed the country with simple didactic narratives that offered readers the emotive aspects of sentimentalism with an evangelical twist. The ATS chose the tract for its accessibility and affordability. Designed for an audience that was growing

increasingly literate, the brief tracts offered tales that urged newly literate readers to consider the condition of their souls and “become as little children.” It is these tracts that prepared the nation, in terms of literacy and subject matter, for the publication of the sentimental novels at mid-century. And it is the ATS that created the eager and accepting community that helped Cummins, Warner, and Stowe reach bestseller status.

CHAPTER V

“A LIGHT SPIRIT FOR WHATEVER GOD HAS IN STORE”:

A CONCLUDING LOOK AT ONE OF THE GENRE’S DESCENDENTS

In the course of this project, I have attempted to address the dramatic difference between American literary sentimentalism of the early republic and its descendent, the mid-nineteenth century sentimental bestsellers, through an examination of the American Tract Society, one of the formative partners in the historical evolution of the genre. The ATS’s modifications to the genre of sentimentalism are most discernable in its version of the death scene, the point of access for this study, and it is these adaptations of the scene’s original elements that form the core of this project.

The ATS’s modifications establish the “generic format” (Saum, “Death” 79) of what Karen Sanchez-Eppler labels the “founding [trope] of sentimentalism” (66). Both Saum and Sanchez-Eppler date the appearance of the trope in this form to the mid-nineteenth-century, bestselling novels of Stowe, Warner, and Cummins. However, in this dissertation, I have tried to date the trope’s appearance instead to the first decades of the nineteenth century and identify the ATS as one of the shaping forces behind that trope’s format. While the sentimental bestsellers of the mid-nineteenth century evidence a fusion between evangelicalism and sentimentalism, this fusion was not the creation of the bestsellers’ authors but rather of the ATS’s roster of tract authors bent on upending the existing order.

Part of what I have tried to do in this project is further complicate the binary opposition originally established in the critical readings of sentimentalism offered by Ann Douglas and Jane Tompkins. The ATS’s tracts defy the application of the traditional

complicit/subversive critical construct. Though the Society's Executive Committee was constituted entirely of males, the stable of tract authors was a mixture of both male and female, as evidenced by the Rev. Mr. Marks authorship of *Little Ann* and the existence of several tracts by Lydia Sigourney. To categorize this cooperative effort as a contributor to Ann Douglas's "feminization of American culture" is, however, a grave mistake. The ATS was not seeking to "stabilize . . . the values that cast their recessive position in the most favorable light" (Douglas, *Feminization* 9); rather, it was seeking to dramatically overturn the existing order with the second coming of Christ.

However, to label the ATS's efforts as an attempt to subvert the patriarchy from the comfort of the home, as Jane Tompkins suggests, is equally inaccurate. While the tract narratives do function as *bildungsromans*, they are quite different than those identified by Nina Baym as quests for self-sufficiency. Instead, they are quests for complete submission, not to the rule of the patriarchy, but to the will of God. Jane Tompkins, in her article "Pray, Therefore, Without Ceasing," draws a connection between the mid-century bestsellers and the tracts and, thus, initiates the line of inquiry which I have pursued in this project. Building on Tompkins's work, I have offered an in-depth examination of the tracts that illustrates not just the ways in which the ATS evangelized the genre of American sentimentalism, but also the ways in which the Society created a community of readers that eagerly embraced the novels of Stowe, Warner, and Cummins and allowed these writers to flourish. Indeed, both the ATS's evangelized version of sentimentalism and the reading community that the Society's death scenes created through collaborative mourning in the early nineteenth century continue to exist today.

Though the sentimental strain in modern literature continues to attract many of the same negative critical evaluations as did its nineteenth-century predecessor, these evaluations have in no way lessened its power or marketability. Lynn Garrett reports in *Publishers Weekly* that “novels with Christian themes and characters have transcended the genres and broken out to general audiences” (50). As modern society grows increasingly fragmented, evangelicalized sentimentalism continues to offer its readers a hopeful communal vision of a nostalgic past and a heavenly future, and a number of current bestselling novels continue to thrive in the literary and religious world created by the ATS.

Chief among these novels and a direct descendent of the ATS’s fusion of evangelicalism and sentimentalism is the fiction of Jan Karon. The author of the bestselling “Mitford Series,” Karon has published nine books in this series that focuses on the quiet village life of fictional Mitford, North Carolina and its small-town Episcopal priest, Father Tim Kavanagh. Throughout the series, Karon assembles a cast of lovable characters, eccentrics, and the occasional villain, in a running story that celebrates the sense of community enjoyed by these insulated rural residents. The books’ bestselling status seems to indicate nostalgia for “a simpler time” born out of Philippe Ariès’s claim that the loss of community is symptomatic of modern life.

That the novels are bestsellers there is no doubt. The *USA Today*’s bestseller database includes fifteen Karon books on its list of top 150 weekly bestsellers (“Best-Selling Books Database”). Five of those have reached the top ten, and ten of the fifteen have reached the top fifty. Collectively, Karon’s books have spent 383 weeks on *USA Today*’s top 150 bestsellers list. *Publisher’s Weekly* includes three Karon novels in its

list of bestselling books of the years between 1996 and 2007 ("Bestselling Books of the Year, 1996-2007). Dwight Garner, reviewer for *The New York Times*, notes that Karon's "sentimental Mitford novels" have "struck a chord; there are some 25 million copies of her books in print" (par. 2). Just like the bestsellers of the nineteenth century, Karon's books have inspired a number of spinoffs and related products, including the Father Tim Series (*Home to Holly Springs*), children's books (*Jeremy: The Tale of an Honest Bunny*, *Violet Goes to the Country*), devotional books (*Patches of Godlight*, *A Continual Feast*), a cookbook (*The Mitford Cookbook and Kitchen Reader*), audio recordings, and a website (www.mitfordbooks.com).

Karon's website attempts to address the same issues of community formation raised in the ATS's tracts and in the mid-nineteenth century's bestsellers. Her website contains a section called "Grapevine," an enormous electronic bulletin board which includes over 28,000 members ("Mitford Books Bulletin Board-Members List"). Sections of this online community are devoted to spiritual requests ("The Prayer Room"), political debate ("The Green Room"), cooking tips ("Recipe Chat"), reading groups for each of the novels in the series, and plans for an annual "reunion" of readers called "Mitford Days" in Blowing Rock, North Carolina, the inspiration for Karon's fictional Mitford. In interesting ways, Jan Karon wears the mantle of the evangelicalized sentimental tradition as she continues to form both fictional and actual communities of her characters and her readers.

Karon's novels make continued use of many of the conventional traits established by the ATS. Numerous characters undergo conversion experiences in the course of the series, and these scenes serve as not-so-subtle reminders to the readers to consider the

condition of their own souls. Each of the novels contains numerous excerpts from hymns and scripture. Additionally, the death scenes of two main characters in the series also echo the characteristics established by the Society almost two hundred years ago. In the death of Uncle Billy in *Light from Heaven* and in the death of Miss Sadie in *These High, Green Hills*, the reader encounters obvious inheritors of the sentimental tradition.

Uncle Billy dies of respiratory failure and old age. In his death scene, he rests in a hospital bed with his minister and confidante, Father Tim, at his side. The following lines from that scene illustrate the continued influence of the ATS: "He realized he was passing up through a cloud, like a feather floating upward on a mild breeze" (211). Billy's increasingly ethereal condition incorporates the same bird imagery as *Catherine Helfenstein* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. "Now, he was in the topmost branches of an apple tree, throwing apples down to his little sister, Maisie, and over yonder was his mama, waiting for him" (211), Karon writes. Billy's transfer into the afterlife is here characterized as a reunion with his dead mother and sister, a characterization reminiscent of both tracts and bestsellers. This modern scene continues the established pattern with its description of Billy's joy: "He knew only that he was happy, very happy; his heart was about to burst. He tried to utter some word that would express the joy. . . ." (211). This scene from Karon's *Light From Heaven* captures the essence of the sentimental deathbed scene as formulated by the ATS.

The death of Miss Sadie includes many of the same similarities. Miss Sadie, too, dies of old age. Her death is captured in the following line: "Sadie Eleanor Baxter died peacefully in her sleep on June 30, in the early hours of the morning" (*These High, Green Hills* 270). While the description is brief, it captures the peace experienced by those who

“die in the Lord,” and further similarities are found in the letter that Father Tim receives posthumously from Miss Sadie. She closes her epistle on a joyful note, writing, “It would be grand if I could live to be a hundred, and go Home with a smile on my face. I believe I will! But if not, I have put all the buttons on my affairs, and feel a light spirit for whatever God has in store for me” (276). Miss Sadie, too, experiences the joy and satisfaction that attends those whose faith allows them to view death as the reward for a virtuous life. Father Tim’s musings at her funeral sum up the message of the tracts and the bestsellers: “How often had people heard that, for a Christian, death is but the ultimate triumph, a thing to celebrate? The hope was that it cease being a fact merely believed with the head, and become a fact to know with the heart, as he now knew it” (281).

Jan Karon represents in many ways the legacy of the evangelicalized sentimental tradition. In an interview with Lauren Winner for *Beliefnet*, Karon echoes the words of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Susan Warner before her. When asked what led her to write the Mitford novels, the author responded simply, “God” (par. 1). In another interview, Karon discusses the impact that her novels have had on her readers; “People say to me, ‘Miss Karon, your books led me to pray that prayer of conversion, and I have become a believer’” (Elliott, par. 19). This impact is exactly what the authors of the ATS’s library of tracts aspired to and what Stowe and her contemporaries hoped for as they penned their nineteenth-century texts.

The publications of the ATS are vitally important to an exploration of American sentimentalism, as they capture the moment in our literary history in which sentimentalism and evangelicalism became inextricably intertwined. In *Selling God*,

Laurence Moore credits the ATS with an influence on popular culture that gave a religious and moral tone to the wide variety of print material that did not come from evangelical presses (17). Gregory Haynes contends that the ATS's most noteworthy contribution was its creation of an audience for an alternative religious literature (16). By the 1850s, the ATS had generated a trope that has had both enormous staying power and influence on the course of American literary history. Had the ATS not shaped popular culture through the distribution of sentimental evangelical tracts, Stowe, Warner, and Cummins might not have enjoyed such broad appeal, nor would the subsequent flow of sentimental novels continue to enjoy commercial success. As a "mighty manufacturer of public opinion" (Twaddell 132), the ATS created a world in which the religious bestseller could flourish, a world that continues to exist today.

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