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Sexual Desire and Social Conventions in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century American Seduction Novels

Christine McIntyre

The College at Brockport

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SEXUAL DESIRE AND SOCIAL CONVENTIONS
IN EIGHTEENTH AND NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICAN SEDUCTION

NOVELS

by

Christine McIntyre

A Thesis
Submitted to the Department of English of the State University of New York, College at Brockport, in partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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SEXUAL DESIRE AND SOCIAL CONVENTION
IN EARLY AMERICAN SEDUCTION NOVELS

By Christine McIntyre

APPROVED:  

Advisor  

date

Reader  

6/15/00

Reader  

6/02/00

Chair, Graduate Committee  

6/15/00

Chair Department of English  

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Introduction

Women’s fiction during the nineteenth century was didactic as well as thematic. Writing after the period of the American Revolution, many women authors attempted narratives that would help develop a national identity, as well as maintain the dictated standards of the centuries to come. Also, with the emergence of a middle class, these books aimed at creating nationally accepted standards and morals that would dictate the development of the nation.

After the Revolution, the United States began to think of itself in terms of a national identity. While considering this identity, men were uncertain as to where to put the female, who was still considered unfit to participate in the polis. However, women began defining a place for themselves. Linda Kerber states, “But the central architects of the new female ideology were women: not only Judith Sargent Murray and Susannah Rowson, but also the anonymous ‘female advocate’” (11). This new ideology of women, formed around the years of the 1780s and 1790s, focused on the role that they would play from the home, which was labeled “Republican Motherhood.” Kerber goes on to explain, “The republican mother integrated political values in her domestic life. Dedicated as she was to the nurture of public-spirited male citizens, she guaranteed the steady infusion of virtue in the Republic… the mother, and not the masses, came to be seen as the custodian of civic morality” (11). The emergence of a sense of national identity or patriotism gave new importance to the role of domesticity. The household, and therefore the women’s
role in its development, became the center of focus as men and women began sharing patriotic roles. Nina Baym states, “Thus within the envelope of shared national citizenship, women are given different patriotic work from men” (xxvi). Men still held the power over the financial realm of the culture, but women were given the charge of raising citizens that would represent the best of the republican ideology. Women's writing during these decades, and the century it grows in, concentrate on the morals of the middle class. Baym says, “this work was part of their aim of instructing readers in the values of the emergent middle class” (xvii).

The specific goal of this genre was to direct and teach women how to become the embodiment of the value, which the republican ideology wished for its entire citizenry. It was believed at this time that if the women could discipline themselves to achieve ideal standards of morality then the men would follow suit. In time, the entire country would become morally virtuous. On this matter Baym states, “Insofar as an important goal of domestic ideology was to theorize the middle-class household as a base for a newly organized female power, a space from which woman’s fiction was to delineate the type of women who could construct such a base and operate productively from it” (xxvii). The result of this was a set of rules that deemed chastity, or virginity, until marriage among the highest of virtues to be upheld. Also, women should see themselves as being responsible for the souls of their men, so to speak. Men could not be expected to act morally towards women if their women did not treat themselves morally. Therefore, women were expected to listen to the teachings of their parents until they were married, at which point the women should then listen to the teachings of their husbands. Essentially, they were instructed to have no free will of their own regarding their own
physical desires because this would upset social convention. As I will explain shortly, this thesis addresses representations of the tension between women's desire and the social conventions that restrain it.

Women's writing at this time was designed to aid women as to how they should or should not live their lives. Baym believes that the novels of this genre share an "overplot," or a common aim, which is educating women on the proper way to behave. She states, "the formal approach reveals that these novels share not only plot but aim. Shaped as novels of education (not as bildungsromanen, which values self-expression over self-discipline), they aim to forward the development, in young, female readers, of a specific kind of character" (xviii-xix). I would agree that each of these novels shares an overplot, but I do not agree with Baym as to what that overplot is.

Susan K. Harris addresses this notion of an overplot and defines it as follows, "Baym identifies an "overplot" in which all the novels participate. Briefly, this overplot mandates that the heroine of any given work will be left destitute – usually financially; will struggle for physical subsistence; and, in the process, will learn to value independence" (9). This certainly might be the case in the latter half of the nineteenth century, when the concept of republican motherhood was abandoned as capitalism caused the country to grow and become financially stable, giving way to a genre in which women were viewed as more ornamental. However, in the beginning of the century, plots were designed more to demonstrate the consequences to women who give into desire, or seek pleasure outside of what male authority has deemed appropriate. For this reason, I believe the overplot could more adequately be expressed as the heroine being seduced, either by a man or her environment. She realizes her mistake too late, struggles
to understand her new situation and eventually dies being unable to reconcile herself to the blunder that she has made, regardless of the fact that she may have achieved self realization. Instead, as Baym postulates, of these women learning the value of independence, as perhaps is possible for women of the latter half of the nineteenth century, women of the first half of the century learn that they should not have attempted their own independence, that she should have relied upon the wisdom of the family unit that was specifically put into place to protect their well being.

The progression throughout the century does show that a gradual change among plot is taking place. Not only did novels surface that introduced concepts of women developing their own sense of individuality, as is the case with *Incidents*, but there was also the emergence of the plot that was to be known as naturalism. Donald Pizer addresses this topic saying, "Man's faith in his innate moral sense and thus his responsibility for his actions, and his belief in the semidivine nature of the American experience and in the healing and preserving roles of the family and love- these and many other traditional values appear to be under attack in the naturalistic novel" (13-14). This plot certainly is the case for *Maggie*, as well as *The House of Mirth* in the respect that both main characters seem to have no moral sense, or as least a severely diluted sense; although from opposite ends of the social spectrum, both characters are deeply wrapped within the constructs of the American experience as they were defined at their respective times; and both characters were abandoned by the family and any concept of love, which might have ultimately saved them. Pizer goes on to define naturalism saying, "Naturalism, in this widely spread view, is above all social realism laced with the idea of determinism. We live in a biologically and socially conditioned world, and it is the
function of the novelist to demonstrate this truth” (14). It is important to note that during this century, the goal of women’s fiction was to teach women how to live in accordance with standards, however those standards may change.

The difference of opinion over the development of plot shows clearly that there were changes during the period of the nineteenth century of the representation of women. It is the different aspects of this change that I have chosen to make the focus of my thesis. This is a formalist thesis dealing with representations of women and therefore historical considerations, while relevant, are of secondary importance. Although there are very important changes in developments in the ideal of womanhood from the early to late nineteenth century, there are also important elements of stability throughout the century. These stable elements included women being considered second-class citizens. Also, women consistently have some ideal to live up to. The two elements are linked together because women are either struggling to uphold this ideal while simultaneously attempting to retain some semblance of individuality, or women have no sense of individuality and find themselves submerged in the roles put forth to them by men. Within these boundaries it is appropriate to subordinate the historical perspective for the formalist. This study is primarily interested in the forms of seduction and how they changed throughout the century as the perceptions of women and their place in culture changed. Chronologically speaking, the representation of women begins with the concept of Republican Motherhood spanning approximately the years of 1780s to the 1850s, when it began to transform into the Cult of True Womanhood, coinciding with slavery, lasting until the 1880s approximately. Following this period, capitalism and urbanization became the new standard and carries into the 1900s. Reacting to capitalism
and the concept of manual labor, the upper class creates a new standard for their women, which can be described as the ornamental ideal. This concept was formulated in the 1900s and in some respects can still be seen in today's culture. Although this thesis does rely upon history to chart the different forms of seduction, they can be adequately analyzed outside the context of chronological order. For the purpose of the study I have chosen four books.

The first chapter is on Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple*, written in 1792. This chapter will focus on the representation of women during the period when the nation was just emerging. This chapter deals with the role of women enveloped in the concept of "republican motherhood," in which women were raised to believe that it was their civic obligation to embody the ideals of virtue and morality so that they nation as a whole might be able to follow their example. Charlotte is a young girl of the middle class who is represented to come from a family that represents all the proper ideals. She is represented as being taken out of her protective element and placed in the larger realm of the world. Once their she neglects to follow the teachings of her mother and finds herself seduced. The narrative interruptions are a didactic element used to point out to young readers the lessons that the author specifically wants them to take notice of. In the end, Charlotte is made to represent very closely the girls that are reading the book and she is used as an example of how not to live their lives.

The next chapter is on Stephen Crane's *Maggie*, written in 1893. *Maggie* doesn't fit in the chronological development of the representation of women. Because of this I placed her closest to the "type" that she represents. In this chapter Crane is interested in Maggie as a function of her environment which is a lower-class capitalistic society,
therefore he does not make the effort to develop her as a character as much as the other chapters do. However, Maggie still belongs in this thesis because she is another didactic element used to show young women, in this case lower class women, the dangers of their environment. Although Crane does not take the time to develop Maggie as a character, he does at least employ her with desire, which the other female characters possess as well. Maggie dreams and desires a better life for herself. It is because she desires a better life and because she is naïve that Crane uses her character to represent the phony morality of the lower classes that is the cause of her rejection. Working within a naturalist context, Crane attempts to show that although the lower classes speak to emulating the moral standards of the middle and upper classes, they are simply pretending to be moral. Crane, in this chapter is attempting to show that environment is more important than character.

The third chapter focuses on the changing pattern of the moral ideal. It can be viewed as being in opposition to industrialization where everything, even women, became a commodity, everything had a money value. This chapter is on Harriet Jacob’s Incident’s in the Life of a Slave Girl, written in 1861. Linda Brent is a slave girl who is forced to face the reality of sexual harassment and seduction by her owner. In the course of the novel, she weighs her options and chooses a lover before she is seduced. In one respect, she is the only character of this study who successfully averts seduction. However, in another respect, she still fails to live up to the ideals and standards set by the society which she is considered outside of. She desires to model herself morally after society, unfortunately she does not possess the means necessary to achieve this. The result of this narrative is another shift in the representation of women, this chapter
introduces the Cult of True Womanhood. According to Barbara Welter, "The attributes of True Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society, could be divided into four cardinal virtues—piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. Put them all together and they spell mother, daughter, sister, wife-woman" (21). Jacobs succeeds in redefining this concept to allow herself to fit within its constructs. She does this by emulating the essence of these standards, but bends them to fit the dynamics of slavery. For example, Jacobs is pious and domestic; however, purity and submissiveness in slavery will bring about the destruction of purity. Therefore, she manipulates the idea of submissiveness to mean that a woman should be submissive to the man she chooses to be pure, pious and domestic for and not, as is the case in slavery, for any man who wishes to own her sexually. In this respect she redefines the cult of True Womanhood that exists at this time in the century.

The last chapter, House of Mirth written by Edith Wharton in 1905, focuses on the upper class and specifically the notion that women have become valuable as ornaments. Although this period has not been codified, in the same way as republican motherhood for the early republic or true womanhood for the mid-century, it resembles that of an ornamental ideal, specifically in the upper class. Lily is a girl who is much older than Charlotte, by over ten years. She is still unmarried and has no money, despite the fact that she has retained her virginity and therefore remains marriageable. Women of the upper class of this time period were raised to believe that they should attempt to marry for the largest amount of money. This is a drastic change from the environment of Charlotte where women were raised to find contentment and a husband with whom they could create a safe haven for the family from the rest of the world. At the turn into the
nineteenth century, women such as Lily Bart are sacrificing domestic pleasure for financially stability, often to the point of financial excess.

Each of these chapters shows different aspects of the representation of women. Each period of the nineteenth century displays what was expected of women by society. Also, each of these chapters shows how the genre of the nineteenth century tried to point out to the women how they should be at each stage of their development and attempted to teach them how they should go about living their lives.
Republican Motherhood in Susanna Rowson’s

*Charlotte Temple*

*Charlotte Temple*, written by Susanna Rowson nine years after the American Revolution ended in 1792, is concerned with the protection of the family unit, as well as with protection of the republican values that the family embodies. The ideology of the early American republic specifically focuses upon the notions of morality, virtue, and contentment, while they attempt to ward off sensual pleasure, egotism, and vanity. The book contains three levels on which this notion is manipulated. The first level of the narrative is the story of Temple, Lucy and Eldridge, in which Rowson represents the ideal family unit. The second level of the narrative is the story of Charlotte, Montraville, La Rue and Belcour, in which Rowson plays out the tragic consequences of abandoning the ideals of the family and following one’s passions. The final level is that of the ever-present narrative voice who shapes and controls the fate of these characters, while using a maternal voice to comfort and direct her readers, whom she looks after as if they were her family.

The eighteenth century was an unsettling period because it underwent many specific transitions. In the wake of the Revolution and with increased immigration, the United States began asserting itself as a more public domain than it previously had been. The result of this was that society as everyone had once known it was changing in a way that left it temporarily unrecognizable and seemingly volatile. As Blythe Forcey puts it, “No longer could all Americans know their neighbors; class boundaries were blurred;
channels of authority shifted; and, as a result, the force of the community could not be relied upon to provide effective social control” (27). It is because of this very chaos surrounding the changing culture that the family unit and its preservation became increasingly important.

This notion of protecting the middle classes or bourgeois family unit became a major topic in the novel. Beginning in the early eighteenth century, circulation of “Moral Weeklies” began, which established the morals and manners of the middle class. As Hansen states, “Two cornerstones of the new ideology were individualism (of each family unit) and privacy… A kind of cozy domesticity surrounded by the nuclear family was proposed as the center of life” (41). This new stress on the household was also the introduction of the morals that embodied the ideal unit, which included Virtue. Specifically, the aspect of chastity was the chief moral for women. In fact, many of the morals of the family unit, even the family unit itself, directed its attention specifically on women. It was believed that women were potentially the embodiment of morality for this emerging culture. As Norton remarks, “Men would be virtuous only if women were. That the morals of the female members of a society automatically determined the morals of their male counterparts” (243) became the new standard.

The “Moral Weeklies” were not the only form of literature at the time addressing the issue. Sentimental novels became “socially relevant documents which could tell us something about society” (Hansen 39). This chapter focuses specifically upon one such novel, Charlotte Temple. Elliot states, “Working within the conventions of the sentimental novel, Rowson’s fiction proclaims her democratic and Protestant vision.
Egalitarian familial obedience, and piety were the ideals she advocated for the growth of her beleaguered female heroines into model republican women” (258).

These, of course, were not the only foundations she was attempting to establish for the purpose of the family unit. Her main focus, as stated earlier, was not merely the production of model women, but the protection of the unit in which they were produced. On this topic McNall says, “The family alone seemed a possible stabilizing force in the early national period; the invention of moral motherhood was to act as a future stabilizer. The family circle must not only be ‘sacred’ in a new way; those who embodied that sacred quality must be prevented from losing it, by having sanctions against encountering the world’s corruption” (28). This quotation represents two things. One, the obvious protection of the unit at all costs; and two, that those who embody these traits must possess a certain level of innocence or naivete about the outside world, as well as wisdom and virtue. Take, for example, the first story.

In the first story of the novel, Temple is represented as having the innocence or naivete that the family unit must possess, protect and cherish. Eldridge, being the model of wisdom and Lucy, representative of perfect virtue, and therefore the ideal eighteenth century woman, represent the ideal family unit, who despite the great adversity they faced, remain loyal and intact. When these two forces meet and merge together as one, the model of the perfect republican family unit is created and represented.

Temple is described completely in terms of his strongest attributes, those being his innocence or his naivete. He believes that because he has such a caring and generous heart, that all men must have similar characteristics. Another way to describe his nature could be his complete lack of recognition for the “other.” To be more specific “the
imagery of an inner world in which the self and other are not differentiated” (Mcnall 30). This means that his heart matches exactly his own feelings and he believes this to be the case with all men. Or, as Rowson puts it, “his heart had not been rendered callous by being convinced of its fraud and hypocrisy. He pitied their sufferings, overlooked their faults, thought every bosom as generous as his own, and would cheerfully have divided his last guinea with an unfortunate fellow creature” (Rowson 21-22). He was a man who had retained his child-like or innocent outlook on life. He looked upon others as a mirror image of himself, incapable of recognizing that others might not possess the same virtues. It is because of this desired innocence that Temple goes in search of a wife who to him is the epitome of “contentment.” He declares “I will not sacrifice internal happiness for outward shew” (Rowson 12). It would appear, from passages in the book, that he arrived at this decision because of the fate of members of his family. For example, he found that his brothers married for money and therefore lead disagreeable lives as a result; and that his sisters were “legally prostituted to old decrepit men” (Rowson 11-12).

This would suggest two things: first that he realizes that money and outward show represent nothing more than the attainment of pleasure and are not the ingredients of a strong familial structure and therefore are not the virtues to be sought after. Second, even in Temple’s innocence, or possibly because of it, he refuses to treat women as many of his counterparts of the day. For example, his father, realizing the relationship that is developing between his son and Lucy, tells Temple that is time for him to wed and that he has picked out his proper mate according to her rank and station. He further mentions that with this union Temple would then have enough money to look after Lucy as his
"mistress." Upon hearing this, Temple is not only appalled, but it "made him shudder at the idea his father had started, of marrying a woman for no other reason than because the affluence of her fortune would enable him to injure her by maintaining in splendor the woman to whom his heart was devoted" (Rowson 24). He does not wish to "legally prostitute" his would-be mate probably because he has wisely, if not naively, recognized what type of a match that would create, not to mention how disrespectful the act would be to both his wife and to Lucy, his love. Instead contentment, even if found "in a cottage" is to be embraced "with as much cordiality as I should if seated on a throne" (Rowson 12). This cottage, for the purpose of narrative effect, might possibly be a jail cell.

The first story demonstrates the model of the family unit and uses every member of this unit to represent different attributes. Just as Temple represents innocence and naivete, Eldridge represents wisdom and strength, and lasting endurance in the face of adversity, Lucy represents the model of the ideal submissive and supportive wife and loyal daughter. Temple first meets Eldridge and his daughter, Lucy, in a prison cell. Despite the apparent devastation of their new position in life the cell is described, "the apartment, though small, and bearing strong marks of poverty, was neat in the extreme" (Rowson 13). This is not the description we should find of people undeserving of respect. In fact, Eldridge himself displays his obvious self worth as "an aged man in a Lieutenant's uniform, which though, threadbare, would sooner call a blush of shame into the face of those who could neglect merit, than cause the hectic of confusion to glow on the cheeks of him who wore it" (Rowson 13).
His merits do not end with his appearance either. He also demonstrates what a
good, trustworthy protector of his daughter’s innocence he tries to be: “I gave my child a
caution to beware of him, and to look on her mother as a friend” (Rowson 16). This
quotation also represents the opposite of a typical stereotype of the time: “The system in
which mothers alone have the responsibility for child care reached its maxim rigidity in
the families of the middle class” (McNall 4). Although this family is far from the
average family, it breaks the stereotype and further enhances the qualities of a strong
family, something the eighteenth century had yet to embrace, the notion that both parents
should raise the child.

He displays emotion for his daughter and his obvious love and sadness at his
inability to protect her from the harshness of life; an example being when he must step to
the window to wipe away a tear and to question “but when I am gone, who will protect
that fair bud of innocence from the blasts of adversity, or from the cruel hand of insult
and dishonour” (Rowson 14). The love he has for his daughter is apparent, as is the
wisdom he displays while confessing his tale to Temple. “Painful as these feelings are, I
would not exchange them for that torpor which the stoic mistakes for philosophy. How
many exquisite delights should I have passed unnoticed, but for these keen sensations,
this quick sense of happiness or misery?” (Rowson 17). His present circumstance has
been so dramatic or rather traumatic that it has put his life into perspective. It is because
of the acute pain, suffering and loss that he has experienced and overcome that he is
capable and ready to recognize and experience the simple joys of life. He has learned not
to take things for granted as he was doing before all these woes befell him.
Cathy Davidson describes Rowson’s books as being popular because of the themes of the times that they discussed, focusing on the attributes of model women. “The themes of filial piety, acceptance of one’s station in life, the nobility of the middle class, faith in virtue unrelated to rank” (771), are the qualities Rowson attributes to a morally upright and devoted woman of the eighteenth century. These are also the qualities Rowson attributes to Lucy.

Following Eldridge is the introduction of his daughter, Lucy. She is described in her simple yet composed dress “and in this simple attire, she was more irresistibly charming to such a heart as Temple’s, than she would have been, if adorned with all the splendor of a country belle” (Rowson 13). Perhaps this is because she keeps herself so well, despite her condition. In fact, it is this virtue and respect that she demands even in her simple appearance, before her actions are even demonstrated to further exaggerate her qualities that became the downfall of this family in the first place. As Eldridge advised his child to stay away from this man, Lucy, being the wonderfully obedient child that she was, paid strict attention to her father. “She was unaffectedly artless; and when, as I suspected, Lewis made professions of love, she confided in her parents, and assured us her heart was perfectly unbiased in his favour, and she would cheerfully submit to our direction” (Rowson 16). Despite the fact that this led the family to financial ruin, it did not touch the unit morally. Lucy lost no faith or trust in her father, because they knew that they had made the right decision. Her father had not sold her out as Temple’s father had done to his sisters. For this they sacrificed their rank for their security.

This, however, is not the only situation in which Lucy represents the ideals of the eighteenth-century woman. Not only is she obedient, but she is almost obsessively
devoted as well. When Eldridge wonders aloud who will look after his daughter when he is gone, Lucy responds "be not anxious on that account; for daily are my prayers offered to heaven that our lives may terminate at the same instant, and one grave receive us both; for why should I live when deprived of my only friend" (Rowson 14). She is so devoted to her father and realistically speaking, his protection, that she would rather die with him than have to face the reality of life and with it making decisions on her own.

Women of Lucy's class, middle class, were not raised ever to enter the work force. In fact, this novel alludes to working women as prostitutes, for that seemed to be one of the few ways a woman on her own could support herself, and the constant danger that faced women without male protection. However, this does not seem to be the case with Lucy. Instead it only adds to her list of merits. "My child supports me by her industry: sometimes by fine needlework, sometimes by painting" (Rowson 20), are the words her father uses to describe her employment. The skills to which Eldridge is referring were generally hobbies taught to women to make them appear more attractive as potential mates. Lucy justifies using them as a means to an end, instead of simply an end in themselves, by responding, "I trust if I employ them in the support of a beloved parent, I shall not be thought an unprofitable servant" (Rowson 20). This seemingly simple quotation actually carries with it much insight into the thought process of that time period. For example, she does not even name her own talents, for she is too modest.

Instead she must allow her father to name them for her. She also seems to be attempting to justify why it is that she is using these skills as employment, as she understands that this is not the normally accepted practice. Also, she acknowledges her docility and her station within the unit as a "servant." In one statement she therefore represents her
servitude to the male figure in her life or her filial devotion; the development of her talents employed as proper resources under the guide of her protector; and her humble and docile nature, all of which are what men of the eighteenth century seek in the qualities of a good wife.

One final aspect of this book that colors Lucy as the perfect woman for her time period is her behavior in her relationship with Temple. At no time in this work does Lucy mention any of her own merits, but they are often commented upon by the male figures, specifically Eldridge and Temple. An example of this can be found in the second story when Lucy wishes to throw a birthday party for her daughter Charlotte. Before she can go ahead with any of her plans, she must first seek the approval of the proper authority in the family, her husband. As he listens to her plans it is noted that "it was tempered so sweetly with the meek affection and submissive duty of the wife" (Rowson 33). He, of course, allows her to go forth with her plans saying that she is a good girl, to which Lucy replies, it is just the duty she owes her parents, to which Temple replies "if she does, she must forget the example set her by the best of mothers" (Rowson 34). Again Lucy is described, through examples and situations, how it is that a woman should respond to situations that life should to present to her.

Specifically, a woman of the eighteenth century should respond by seeking the opinion of her mother and if she is absent then she should seek her father. These two figures are the proper authority in a woman's life until she is wed and then her husband takes over this charge. She is not considered capable of making an informed decision on her own. Kerber puts it that "Women were thought to make their moral decisions in the context of the household" (7). This was true because, as was stated earlier, the family
unit was the focus of every morally upright girl. The family was the focus out of necessity, because a marriageable girl could not easily be financially independent at this time. Kerber goes on to say that characteristically, "the absorption of a married woman's property into her husband's control during the life of their marriage (was defined as coverture, a common practice of the time). Since only the citizen with independent control of property was thought to be able to exercise free will, it seemed to follow that the married woman had no independent political capacity" (Kerber 9).

If it is the case that a married woman had no free will, as it was at this time, then certainly no daughter should be left alone with her own mind. Hansen explains, "Because chaos threatens and it does through passion in any sentimental novel, middle-class values like reason, prudence and self protective modesty all are important" (43). Just as all of these traits are exemplified in the first story, they are almost completely absent in the second. The second story represents life without the family unit as the core and the focus and as a result there is utter disaster. Instead of searching for contentment, virtue and reason, these characters seem to desire pleasure without reason or thought towards consequence. Rowson says, "Pleasure is a vain illusion; she draws you on to a thousand follies, errors, and I may say vices, and then leaves you to deplore your thoughtless credulity" (34). The result of their search will be individual suffering and destruction. Lucy would never have to learn what this suffering and destruction felt like first hand, because she never left the confines of the socially acceptable behaviors for women. Charlotte, on the other hand, did not heed the advice of her parents and was not loyal to either her parents or the rules of her society. As a result, she would be made an example of, through the misery and self-destruction she would soon face.
The character of Charlotte is much like that of Temple in that she represents naivete and innocence. She is very much the opposite of the character of Lucy, who was submissive, obedient and devoted. Instead, Charlotte is inquisitive, disobedient and forgetful, qualities not very representative of a model woman. It would have been “better that Charlotte had not been torn between duty and latent rebelliousness toward her parents, since they provided her only defense against a malevolent world” (Derounian-Stodola 170), but that is not to be the case.

The first time Charlotte is introduced is even before the first story. It is a scene in which Montraville slips a note into her hand. The second time she is introduced, she is having a conversation with La Rue about the outing they just had from school, to visit men. It is in this conversation that Charlotte expresses her obvious ignorance about certain facts of life. She admits that she thought the men were “very free in their manner” (Rowson 30), to which La Rue responded that she was being a prude. Further in the conversation she remembers that she has the note from Montraville, to which she admits “my mother has often told me, I should never read a letter given me by a young man, without first giving it to her” (Rowson 31). If Charlotte had the ideals of the family unit in mind, if she respected the notion that she should be obedient to her parents, if she had not tried to make a decision on her own, she may have averted disaster, but this was not to be her fate. It was because of her innocence, or her naivete, that she looked to La Rue for advice on this situation. La Rue was supposed to be her matronly advisor in the absence of her mother. Unfortunately, Charlotte could not recognize that La Rue was only concerned with protecting herself, which never had anything to do with Charlotte’s best interests.
The ideal of devotion, or the desire to please is already apparent in Charlotte, but it is misdirected to the extreme. The concept of filial duty, or a child’s duty, is based on the notion that the woman is to place the desires of another, either her parents or a husband, as was seen in the case of Lucy. But this notion has not been fully developed within Charlotte and she is left with only the desire to please. She wishes to please La Rue, “I love you too well, to do anything that would injure you in my governess’s opinion” (Rowson 30). She wishes to please Montraville, who pretends he will remove his affections for her because she has hurt his feelings as was seen in the line “Then you love your parents more than you do me, Charlotte?” (Rowson 42). It is here that Charlotte not only forgets the love and devotion she is supposed to have for her family only, but she also completely neglects their instruction.

She is attempting to make decisions about her own life and her own fate that she is by no means prepared to do. La Rue says it perfectly when she said to Charlotte, “You are a strange girl, you never know your own mind two minutes at a time” (Rowson 44). She allows herself, whether willingly or no, to be advised by people whom she can’t even recognize as people out for their own benefit, and all for the sake of pleasure.

The character of Montraville is similar to Lucy only in the respect that he is the object of desire to Charlotte, much as Lucy was to Temple in the first story. He is very much opposite Lucy, in the respect that Lucy, in her role of the object of desire, represents contentment, whereas Montraville represents only pleasure. In fact, it is only when Charlotte finds herself defending Montraville against La Rue that she discovers she has feelings for him: “Charlotte still held the letter in her hand: her heart swelled at the conclusion of Mademoiselle’s speech.” (Rowson 32). If La Rue had not chided Charlotte
so, Montraville may have been forgotten that very night, but again that was not the case. Being the inquisitive child that she was her interest was piqued. Being the boy that Montraville was, his interest was piqued as well.

However, he is not that flat a character. To his credit, he does not simply represent a malevolent character out to seduce a young innocent, but something even worse, a naïve boy who does not consider the consequences of his actions. His father offers him sound parental advice, that “A soldier has no business to think of a wife till his rank is such as to place him above the fear of bringing into the world a train of helpless innocents, heirs only to penury and affliction” (Rowson 10). He even goes as far as to threaten him by withholding financial support should such a situation occur. However, Montraville does not consider these realities enough.

The conversation is fresh in his mind when he leaves, but as it becomes time to depart for America, it seems as though the conversation never took place. All he is concerned about is having a bed-fellow on his voyage to America and never goes so far as to think what ruin he might bring about for this poor child. His mate, Belcour, will have a companion and they have decided that he should have one too. He is the type of man no woman should search after for he displays no signs of moral responsibility.

Knowing full well that he cannot marry Charlotte and take care of her in the fashion that is suitable to their class, he still takes full advantage of his manipulating tactics to persuade her to join in the journey. He calls her, “Cruel Charlotte” and goes on to twist her mind by having her believe that should she say no, he will actually die from this: “if you disappoint my ardent hopes, by all that is sacred, this hand shall put a period to my existence. I cannot--will not live without you” (Rowson 47). He is by no means
attempting to go through the proper customs of courtship of the time, in the hopes of creating a family with this still virtuous maiden. Instead, he too is in search of short-lived pleasure without the sense to think of the long-term effects.

The characters of La Rue and Belcour together mirror the image of the character of Eldridge because of the advisory positions that they hold in the second story, La Rue to Charlotte and Belcour to Montraville. The differences between these characters lie in their goals. La Rue wishes to seek protection at any cost, while Belcour seeks only pleasure for pleasure's sake. Both of these characters are dangerous because of the manipulations they are capable of playing on the innocent mind and care very little, if at all, about the outcome of their games.

La Rue is a hardened woman, who represents what will result from the search of pleasure. She is now forced to manipulate her situation in the hopes of deceiving a moral man into giving her protection. The description of La Rue and her employment as a teacher is that "those assistants were not always exactly such as parents of delicacy and refinement would wish a daughter to copy" (Rowson 26). She is only concerned about her own situation. In fact, when Charlotte looks to her for advice about what to do with the letter, whether or not she should seek her mother's advice, La Rue responds, "have you a mind to be in leading strings all your lifetime" (Rowson 31). She never thinks of the situation Charlotte is in, that perhaps her family would not wish her to be introduced to such an element without their approval. Instead she thinks only of the trouble she, herself, may be in should someone discover the letter.

Another example of how she is only out to improve her own situation is while they are on the voyage. To begin, she is not even concerned about the example she is
setting for Charlotte. She has completely abandoned any fronts to be her protector and set about considering her own situation. "La Rue readily conceiving he never meant to fulfil his promise, determined to change her battery, and attack the heart of Colonel Crayton" (Rowson 58). The ridiculousness of her seduction lies in the fact that she conquers Crayton with a story that could be exactly the story of Charlotte. That she in fact was seduced by her friends under the guise of marriage, but had the sense to realize what a situation she was in (very unlike Charlotte) and repent her errors (Rowson 58). She doesn’t even have the decency to share her knowledge with the poor girl and give her a chance to save her future and return to the protection of her loving family.

Belcour, on the other hand, is the most ruthless and destructive character in the book, for he represents pleasure, simply for pleasure’s sake and at any cost whatsoever. He is described as paying "little regard to the moral duties, and less to religious ones: eager in the pursuit of pleasure, he minded not the miseries he inflicted on others. Self, daring self, was the idol he worshipped, and to that he would have sacrificed the interest and happiness of all mankind" (Rowson 37). The fact that this man paid no regard to morals is not even half the evil he represents in this book. It is the fact that he worships only his wishes and desires that make him such a threatening character to our poor unsuspecting Charlotte. If she is not capable of separating others from herself and recognizing that all are not truly out for her benefit, then she has no hope of protecting herself from a character like Belcour, especially without the help, guidance and protection of her family.

It was Belcour who decided that Charlotte should join them on their journey. Where a true friend would have talked some sense into Montraville about his situation,
Belcour did just the opposite. Rowson states, “he rather encouraged the growing passion of Montraville; and being pleased with the vivacity of Mademoiselle, resolved to leave no argument untried, which he thought might prevail on her to be the companion of their intended voyage” (38). He was also the person who tried to redirect Montraville’s passions towards someone else, when he knew for certain he would not marry Charlotte, so that he may attempt to gain her for himself. Rowson explains, “he knew that Montraville did not design to marry her, and he formed a resolution to endeavour to gain her himself whenever Montraville should leave her” (59). This man was such a degraded character that he had it in his mind to make a total ruin out of one that was once so sweet pure and innocent. He even goes so far as to accuse Charlotte as to be not as innocent as she was. Rowson puts it, “Dear Montraville, act more like a man of sense; this whining, pining Charlotte, who occasions you so much uneasiness, would have eloped with somebody else if she had not with you” (83). He has absolutely no respect for Charlotte or what may come of her in the future. He wishes only to control her completely, and if he cannot he will leave her to die.

It is this pleasure that Belcour represents which is the ultimate demise of Charlotte. In her innocence and naivete she neglects the virtues and the morals of the family unit in order to seek this pleasure; however, she can never fully enjoy it nor seek it completely because she does recognize her error and guilt. This pleasure, in turn, attempts to overtake her completely and the struggle results in the demise of Charlotte. She, ultimately, is not strong enough to fight off the manipulations of a world without family ideals, and her salvation arrives too late.
It is this exact circumstance that the narrator wishes to make apparent to all young fair maidens, in the hopes that they will not travel the same horrible and destructive path. As Stern says, “What compels us to lose ourselves in the seemingly primitive fable that is Charlotte Temple lies not in the framed narrative of virtue imperiled, but in the figure working through the frame: the maternal voice that presides over and attempts to control the losses exacted within her narrative” (2). It is the narrator, Rowson, who tries to point out the characters’ failure to abide by an acceptable moral system. There are places in the book where she actually interrupts the narrative in order to make her point clear.

Stern addresses this by saying, “Speaking within the highly artificial context of a novelistic discourse, the narrator is fully aware that young female readers of fiction need to be grounded in the hard realities of the world in which they live” (3). Rowson expresses this intent from the very beginning of her novel. In the preface she speaks of herself as possibly having a family one-day and would like her children, specifically her daughters, to be prepared or at least aware of the harshness of life. She says that in thinking of writing this book she had in mind “the many daughters of Misfortune who, deprived of natural friends [such as family], or spoilt by a mistaken education [as Charlotte is by La Rue], are thrown on an unfeeling world without the least power to defend themselves from the snares not only of the other sex, but from the more dangerous arts of the profligate of their own” (Rowson 5). The entire book that follows is merely an attempt to play out an example of what she is referring to in this quote. At each step along the way Rowson either points out how Charlotte could have avoided her own destruction, or how her naivete allows her to be misled by characters such as La Rue.
The first time Rowson interrupts the story is when we meet Charlotte and she has just received the letter from Montraville while she snuck out for the evening. It seems as though the narrative is in freeze frame as the narrator takes the opportunity to say: “In affairs of love, a young heart is never in more danger than when attempted by a handsome young officer” (Rowson 28). This is an age-old warning, even a cliche these days, for women to beware of men in uniform. Woman can by no means trust her own heart in a matter such as this and she understands how one might feel. However, because this is a tale of morality and she wouldn’t want anyone to think she was encouraging the passions of these young readers, she must attend to her other audience, the mothers and the fathers who, in a tight familial structure, should be paying close attention to who is guiding the minds of their daughters. To the mothers she gives them to understand, “I mean no more by what I have advanced, than to ridicule those romantic girls, who foolishly imagine a red coat and silver epaulet constitute a fine gentleman” (Rowson 28).

By sympathizing with her audience and berating them at the same time, she is acting as a mother figure. She wants these women to learn that although she understands the confusion their hearts may be feeling, it is the head and reason that should be in control, specifically in matters such as these. This is a time for reason, no longer can men be trusted on looks alone, and they must learn to be aware of this. She even goes so far as to make the reader feel guilty as she addresses the fathers saying: “when I think on the miseries that must rend the heart of a doating parent, when he sees the darling of his age at first seduced from his protection, and afterwards abandoned, by the very wretch whose promises of love decoyed her from the paternal roof.” (Rowson 28-29). Here, she is implying two things. One, the sadness a father will feel at watching his beloved daughter
destroy herself, and him not being able to stop it. And two, she is implying that any
girl leaving the protection of her family under any circumstances other than with the
parents consent, will lead to ruin. Kerber says, “[Women] learned that the seduced were
likely to be abandoned; they were taught not to trust their own passions” (11). A moral,
virtuous girl can only be so if she carries herself in a moral way and refrains from being
seduced by any elements outside the family unit.

The second time Rowson interrupts the story is to warn of the way in which the
same sex may prey upon the others’ romantic ideals. Specifically, how a woman with
experience of the world, one who has fallen away completely from family ideals and is
individual in thought and action may take advantage of one who is far less
knowledgeable as well as dependent upon others for the purpose of decision making. An
example of this is the following quotation which describes why La Rue cared so little
about protecting the virtue that Charlotte possessed.
Here let me stop to make one remark, and trust me my very heart aches while I write it; but certain I am, that when once a woman has stifled the sense of shame in her own bosom, when once she has lost sight of the basis on which reputation, honour, every thing that should be dear to the female heart, rests, she grows hardened in guilt, and will spare no pains to bring down innocence and beauty to the shocking level with herself: and this proceeds from that diabolical spirit of envy, which repines at seeing another in the full possession of that respect and esteem which she can no longer hope to enjoy. (Rowson 32)

The lesson in this quote is that a woman who has no sense of virtue or morality for herself and has fallen, suffers no guilt in the attempt to take an innocent girl with her. Therefore it is the girl's job to be aware of the other as it were, of women such as these and to stay away from them.

Yet another interesting point in this quotation, besides the explanation of La Rue's motives, is the comment about the stifling of the sense of shame. Rowson is suggesting that if a woman is aware of the poor judgement she made at one time, this does not mean that she is doomed for good. If she feels shame, there is still the opportunity to repent her errors and recover some of that lost virtue, however once that sense of shame is lost, and the woman gives into her egotism, she is also lost to the family unit.

Another point in the novel at which Rowson interjects is when she is talking about Lucy, who wants to plan a party for Charlotte. Lucy is painted in the light of the model republican woman, going about everything in the correct manner. Before she goes ahead
with the party plans, she confirms them with her husband first. It appears as though Rowson becomes frustrated, as a mother might, with daughters who senselessly ruin themselves in the search for pleasure. She abandons the story yet again to ask: "ye thoughtless daughters of folly, have ye ever found the phantom you have so long sought with such unremitted assiduity?" (Rowson 34). She is speaking, of course, of pleasure and how empty it is. She speaks for almost two pages on the evils of pleasure and how it is content and only content that can save no matter if the girl is of "poverty," "mediocrity," or "affluence."

This novel, along with many others of its time, is written in the style of the sentimental novel "by emphasizing rationality rather than romance" (Davidson 771). Rationality is consistent with sentimentality in this respect, because the sentimentality being referred to focuses on the family and how one should act towards and within the confines of that particular unit. It uses themes of seduction, submission, dependence and imprisonment to clearly define what virtues a woman of the eighteenth century must possess. It is clear that the woman must be the embodiment of morality so that the family unit in its entirety may also possess these characteristics. The characteristics of an ideal family being that the male represent the protector and advisor, while the woman represents the docile, submissive, virtuous dependent. They must not be able to recognize the other, "it is none-the-less the imagery of an inner world in which the self and the other are not differentiated...and in which the female autonomy of any sort has no place" (McNall 30). These women had to learn to be passive and part of a whole and they should therefore never attempt to make decisions or live their lives on their own. If that be the case, they have only to look forward to shame, manipulation and ruin.
This novel has developed and represented these familial ideal and characteristics from three levels: one, from the perfect example of what the family should embody, two, from the aspect of a ruinous situation and how to avoid it, and three from the motherly advisor, who direct her pupils slowly and carefully through a story to make certain they understand at each step along the way the decisions being made and the consequences of those decisions. The novel has proven itself to be a handbook for young women on how to remain morally upright, remain and embody the characteristics of the family unit and the role she plays in it.
Imitation and Disillusionment: A Discussion of Crane’s *Maggie*

The importance of *Charlotte Temple* to this project revolves around Rowson’s analysis of the family unit, especially its qualities and the importance of its preservation. In its analysis of upper-middle class society, the female has been designated as the embodiment of the moral entity. Because of this, women were placed into a specific category in which morality, virtue, and contentment were the standards to be upheld. To seek individuality, meaning a desire indulge egotism, would not only ruin a woman for marriage, but would ruin her standings in society as a whole. Therefore, women in this upper middle class environment were kept under careful surveillance of the ever-watchful eye of the parent. Women were not to have any contact with bachelors, except through the filter of the parents, or a trusted surrogate. The cultural belief was that a young girl did not have enough sense about the world to make her own decisions, and it was this precious naivete that the parents wished to protect. It was on this premise that the entire environment of this class revolved.

Thus, egotism, obedience to the family and the emulation of a moral code are specific reasons that environment is a major factor of a young girl’s virtue. Almost a century after *Charlotte Temple*, society had become seriously volatile. The result of this was that a girl needed the reliability of her family even more than before to demonstrate to her the correct ways to act and think.

In his short narrative written in 1893, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets*, Stephen Crane seeks to undertake an experiment, suggesting that the lower classes have such
degraded standards that a woman is powerless to remain virtuous. Charles Child Walcutt says, "In telling this story, Crane fuses the elements of poverty, ignorance, and intolerance in a context of violence and cruelty to create a nightmarish world wavering between hallucination and hysteria" (165). Crane's novel is contrived and controlled in such a way that the environment is in the most destitute and deplorable of conditions. Although *Charlotte Temple* was also contrived it did not appear to be so obvious, as this novel does, because Maggie is a completely flat character who seems to possess no free will; whereas, Charlotte did at least have the appearance of free will as well as the ability to make poor decisions. Maggie is too naïve and too linked to the degradation of her particular surroundings to understand what is important to her culture if anything. He adds to this story parents, who are only concerned with their own affairs and seem to be burdened by the weight of children. He then sets in the middle of this environment a young girl, who is completely naïve as to the ways of the world, and watches to see the outcome. With no help from her parents or her brother as to which is the correct path to choose, with no one at all to talk to for advice, it becomes inevitable that this girl is doomed. In fact, her task is made all the more difficult, which is the element of hallucination alluded in the above quote, because no one is clear as to what moral code this particular society has adopted. It would appear that they have chosen to emulate the code of the class above them, but have no clear means or guidelines of gaining admission to that class. The result of this is that Maggie sets out to obtain a better life for herself. She has no definite concept of any set of morals that she should abide by because no particular code of morals is employed as a functional standard and therefore is not aware that she is going against any standard. It is not until it is too late that her family ridicules
her for displaying what is the reality of this particular culture, that the lower class has a
false sense of morality.

The environment of this story is made perfectly clear from the beginning. The
story itself opens with a scene of violence, in which Maggie's brother, Jimmie, is
attempting to single-handedly fight a group of boys from the surrounding neighborhood.
The violence and the complacency of the members of the culture are evident as can be
seen in this quotation: "On their small, convulsed faces there shone the grins of true
assassins. As they charged, they threw stones and cursed in shrill chorus... from a
window of an apartment house that upreared its form from amid squat, ignorant stables,
there a leaned curious woman. Some laborers, unloading a scow at a dock at the river
paused for a moment and regarded the fight" (Crane 3). This quotation represents two
points that are extremely important to understanding the rest of the story. The first point
is that this fight that Jimmie is in, outnumbered and alone, is a metaphor for Maggie's
chances of survival in the moral battle of her environment. She too is outnumbered, and
alone. The difference is that eventually Jimmie is rescued by Pete, whereas, in Maggie's
case, Pete becomes the catalyst of her failure.

The second point that is important in this quote is the representation of the people
in environment. They are curious and above all content to look on. They will not save
the obviously doomed child. Instead, they will look on curiously waiting to see the final
outcome with an attitude of not caring in the slightest what that outcome may be.

Violence in this culture or class of people is the standard. There is no room for
compassion or concern.
These people do not feel a moral duty to step in and protect this vulnerable youth. As La France sees it, Crane is attempting to demonstrate that “environment is a tremendous thing in the world and frequently shapes life regardless” (38). It is as if he is stating that Maggie is doomed to immorality despite any effort on her part to resist. The context of this statement does not necessarily refer only to Maggie’s predicament, but is also a generalization about naturalism. However, this is applicable, because it applies to Crane’s position on environment.

Charles Loring Brace would agree with Crane’s insight, because he believes that the women of this culture are soiled from birth and therefore have no true concept of morality. He says:

> It has often seemed to me one of the most dark arrangements of this singular world that a female child of the poor should be permitted to start on its immoral career with almost every influence about it degrading, its inherited tendencies overwhelming toward indulgence of passion its examples all of crime or lust, its lower nature awake long before its higher, and then that it should be allowed to soil and degrade its soul long before the maturity of reason, and beyond all human possibility of cleansing. (66)

His opinion is such that he believes that Maggie never had a chance, that from the very beginning her soul was soiled by the environment and would therefore become yet another degrading aspect of that same environment. The influences were far too overpowering for one small child to overcome. I tend to agree that Maggie is not responsible, but I would suggest that the reason is Crane’s decision to have her appear
dim. There are not many times that we are allowed a glimpse of Maggie's thoughts, especially at the end. Instead, we are left with only her actions and very little explanation. I feel that Maggie is being manipulated by external forces for the purpose of being used as an example of the degradation of her society.

However, other critics are not so sympathetic to Maggie's situation. For example, Marston La France seems to believe that Maggie had at least no more or no less of a chance that anyone else in her environment, implying that other women have survived, morally speaking. He says:

And she cannot be determined by her external environment simply because the novel's structure places her and her slum environment in exactly the same position relative to the other characters: both [Maggie and the furniture in the house] are alike passive, inert, acted upon, actually shaped by the twisted values and hypocritical actions of Mrs. Johnson, Jimmie, and Pete; and Maggie's downfall at the hands of Pete is as predictable as the fate of a roomful of new furniture in the hands of the drunken Mrs. Johnson because Maggie chooses to resist Pete about as much as the furniture resists her mother. (40)

It is clear, then, that he would hold Maggie accountable for her own actions. He admits to the truth of her degraded state, but then says that it is exactly this degraded state that puts her on the same level as everyone else in the environment.

Although, I am inclined to agree with his position that every character in this story is equal, in the respect that they are all living under the same social conditions, I would have to disagree that this automatically makes Maggie responsible. The reason
being that Maggie does not make informed decisions. She was a true innocent, she did not mean to attempt to become corrupt. This was not her goal. Her goal perhaps was happiness, but since she did not know the meaning of the word, she therefore did not know how to correctly go about obtaining this happiness.

Also, it is important to note that Crane was not so concerned with the development of Maggie as a character. He wanted to use her as a type, one that could be representational of all characters in this element. He chose to make her an innocent so that she might prove his point that no one can escape the influences of environment; however, writing from a male point of view, he was incapable of developing the character of Maggie as a character that was capable of her own thought. The only aspect that he developed in her was her naivete and a desire for a better life. Joseph Brennan speaks on Maggie’s soul and has this to say: “But if Crane did not spare Maggie’s intelligence, he did at least intend to spare her soul, to depict her as the innocent victim of the brutal forces around her, a flower which ‘blossomed in a mud puddle,’ only to be sullied and broken and trampled back into it” (183). Maggie could not be held responsible for her decisions or her actions, because she did not fully comprehend what it was she was doing.

She reflects Charlotte in this respect because neither of these girls had any informed or concrete comprehension of the world outside their parent’s living room. Maggie is an innocent. The tragedy of this novel, however, is that happiness is never truly obtained. Thomas A. Gullason says, “…there is no real movement from happiness to misery (Maggie’s happiness is short-lived), only movement from misery to more misery” (245). If Maggie were truly seeking happiness it would be difficult to obtain, for
she surely would not know where to find it. In the case of Charlotte, or even Linda Brent, as seen in the chapter to come, we at least see their thought process and therefore have some inkling of their goals and desires. However, Maggie only appears to be blown about in the wind, so to speak, not giving any consideration to her actions.

Her childhood did not incorporate happiness. Instead, “the children of the poor grow up in joyless homes to lives of wearisome toil…” (Riis 77). The language is rough and jarring, suggesting that much of this society follows suit. Take for example, this section of a chapter that is the last we see of Maggie’s childhood.

The small frame of the ragged girl was quivering. Her features were haggard from weeping, and her eyes gleamed from fear. She grasped the urchin’s arm in her little trembling hands and they huddled in the corner. The eyes of both were drawn, by some force, to stare at the woman’s face, for they thought she need only to awake and all the fiends would come from below. (Crane 13)

It is easy to see from the language, specifically the adjectives, “trembling,” “quivering,” and “huddled,” that the children are not in a calm and nurturing environment. The children are living in a state of fear. They are haggard and they are huddled. These are not descriptive words of a happy and well-balanced childhood, especially when their mother seems to be “capable of calling forth the depths of hell.” This phrase is very significant because of the fact that in many other scenes the mother is depicted as a drunkard who abuses her husband, as well as her children, which is a stark difference from the motherly nature of Lucy Temple. In fact, it almost seems as if the mother is
more closely related to the character of LaRue in the respect that the mother is not looking after her daughter’s best interest.

Like the character of LaRue, Maggie’s mother is only concerned with her own state of affairs and sees the world through hardened eyes, not caring whether or not Maggie’s virtue is her responsibility. The next we see of Maggie she has finally blossomed and has become a pretty girl. Wolford states, “Such as they were, childhood and adolescence end early. By the fifth chapter, the father and the ‘babe,’ Tommie, have died; brother Jimmie has grown up ‘hardened,’ and ‘the girl, Maggie, [has] blossomed in a mud puddle.’ Beauty, however, provides no way out, only the choice between the hells of the sweatshop and the street” (79).

Clearly, the rules of this class are different from the upper classes, because women of the upper classes would never be forced to work, and surely never as an option to escape prostitution. This is yet another example of how this culture tries to model its morals on the class above and fails because of simple calculated differences, such as the concept of labor. Upper middle class mentality required that women should never work if they could at all help it, unless their financial position deemed that they should use those skills, such as needlework, designed to attract a husband in the office of supporting her family. The second thing that occurs is that it is Jimmie who informs Maggie that she must either work or go into prostitution. "‘Mag, I’ll tell yeh dis! Yeh’ve edder got the go the hell or go the work!’” whereupon she went to work, having the feminine aversion of going to hell” (Crane 16). This quote is curious because it never mentions the office of prostitution, but only alludes to it as being hell.
Also, Maggie’s having the feminine aversion of going to hell would imply that she does indeed possess moral character, but it is difficult to say about what. I believe that her sense of aversion is imposed upon her by the author of this tale to represent her innocence, meaning that instinctually she wished to do what was right, and according to what her brother said, and the way he said it, work was what was right. I say that the author imposed this upon her, because there is so little character development. Crane is satisfied with developing aspects of her character only when it suits the purpose of advancing his cause and an innocent would not desire after hell.

It is also in this chapter that Maggie first meets Pete. Interestingly enough, just as in *Charlotte Temple*, where the brother introduces the negative outside element into the family unit, Jimmie is the character who introduces Maggie to her seducer. Also similar to *Charlotte Temple* is the way in which the character Pete resembles that of Montraville. Just as Montraville did not specifically set out to ruin Charlotte, Pete did not set out to ruin Maggie. In both cases, the men merely assumed that the girls knew what the consequences of their decisions would be, because they were more concerned about gratifying their own desires. Also, after the girl’s destruction was made clear, both felt remorse over the roles they played in that destruction. It might be said that Maggie’s greatest error, besides being naïve, is that she truly wished for a life better than the one she was living. She did not care for her job, or for living in the overcrowded and completely public tenement. It is these two factors that combined together create the mindset that caused Maggie to be seduced by Pete. She felt that he possessed whatever characteristics necessary to give her a better life. Donald Pizer states:

For though her world does not affect her moral nature, it does contribute to
her downfall by blurring her vision. Her primary drive in life is to escape her mud-puddle prison, and she is drawn to Pete because his strength and elegance offer a means of overcoming the brutality and the ugliness of her home and her work. Her mistaken conception of Pete results from her enclosed world, a world which has given her romantic illusions. (191)

Maggie does not understand that just because Pete appears to dress better than her brother or her mother, this does not necessarily mean that he is indeed better. Upon their first introduction, Maggie noticed Pete’s self-confidence, and interpreted this as a show of personal superiority. She also noticed his clothes and thought him graceful and elegant. "Maggie perceived that here was the beau ideal of a man. Her dim thoughts were often searching for far away lands where, as God says, the hills sing together in the morning. Under the trees of her dream gardens there had always walked a lover" (Crane 19).

Maggie’s reaction is natural considering that she has led such a sheltered life. Her response is natural, meaning that every girl wishes to grow up one day and find a lover. The problem with Maggie’s “dim” thought process is that she cannot identify that the man of her dreams is perhaps not the man standing before her. Instead, the opposite happens, and he grows in stature against the backdrop of her dingy dwelling. She felt that his greatness swelled to incorporate the entire room and as she considered her employment, “It began to appear to her mind as a dreary place of endless grinding” (Crane 20). The stories he told made him appear as though he was a man who defied the grudge under which they all found themselves living and this of course appealed to the
young mind. He began to take the form of someone who could save her from her miserable existence.

It is difficult to understand completely what Maggie’s thoughts were, meaning whether or not she struggled over any decision or whether or not she was aware of her probable ruin. The reason for this is because Crane only lets out minute bits of information when it is necessary to keep the story moving. Crane keeps Maggie as an interior-less character, because he does not need to develop that aspect of her in order to show how she becomes seduced by her environment. In fact, it is because he leaves out the complexity of her being a thoughtful character that the reader can easily follow the environment argument that is the main focus of his narrative.

The reader may find it difficult at times to understand Maggie’s thought process because there isn’t one. So much so that it may be difficult to evoke sympathy for the character. Brennan states, “For Maggie is no more spared by Crane’s irony than the rest of his characters. Indeed, however, sympathetically in other respects she may be portrayed, her tastes and mental perceptions are sometimes absurd to the point of exasperation” (183). So when Maggie sees Pete a second time and he is wearing a different suit, she automatically assumes that he must have quite an extensive wardrobe (Crane 20-21). The reader can’t help but wonder why it is that she would automatically assume this and her innocence seems to waver into stupidity. However, it is not so difficult to understand when the narrative intention is made clear. Maggie must assume that he has extensive wardrobe for two reasons: first, she and her family only have one set of wardrobe, for they are in the same clothes throughout and second, it is this aspect of his seemingly higher financial status that allows her to believe that he can give her a
better life. In her state of utter naivete, she seems fit to go along with the first thought that comes into her mind and to follow that thought through. In this case, she feels that two suits means financial stability and a better way of life and so she mistaken believes that she has found her way out.

La France states, therefore, “for Maggie, in other words, a conflict is set up which places Pete and the illusion of escape into happiness on one side and her mother and the tenement world on the other” (58). Maggie is only aware of a promise of something new and different with Pete, whereas with her mother, she knows all too well what that type of life is. With this understanding, Maggie decides to accept a date with Pete, not realizing that this decision leads to her inevitable ruin. She does not ask her mother's permission or advice. Neither does she seek either from her brother. On the night of Maggie’s first date, her mother is in a drunken stupor, amidst a violently wrecked apartment. As Maggie goes to leave, her mother “blasphemed and gave her daughter a bad name” (Crane 21). It would seem that this is foreshadowing of Maggie’s predicament. The mother is certainly not supportive of her daughter or trying to look out for her best interests, but instead is placing curses upon her daughter, who sadly has no idea what she is getting herself into. She is out to seek pleasure and happiness and no one has bothered to inform her that perhaps this is not the most appropriate way to go about getting what she wants.

It could easily be said that it is the mother who has caused Maggie’s downfall, because she did not adequately attempt to look out for her daughter’s well being. Brennan says, “it is the mother who is really culpable for Maggie’s seduction and ruin, for it is the mother who has most ruthlessly outraged Maggie, who has violated her soul
repeatedly and trampled her sensibilities” (182). There is no point in the earlier half of the novel where the mother is seen as anything but a drunk. She is not giving her daughter advice, or attempting to protect her from accidentally becoming involved with the wrong sort of man, with the sort of man who might only be trying to take advantage of her daughter’s precious innocence. There is even a point, after Maggie has gone on her first date with Pete and is dazzled by him and because of this not sure what to do, when Maggie wishes that she had someone to turn to, in order to help her sort out her thoughts and emotions. “Maggie was anxious for a friend to whom she could talk about Pete…at home she found her mother often drunk and always raving” (Crane 26). It is obvious that her mother is not concerned about counseling her daughter, so much as she is concerned with becoming drunk or repeatedly ruining the apartment.

With no guidance of any kind from her family, Maggie is left on her own to make her own decisions. She begins to realize that her youth may not be around for too much longer and perhaps she should take advantage of the opportunity offered her by Pete (Crane 25). She has disillusioned herself into believing that Pete is her savior from her dreary life and her downfall is secured in this scene taking place in the middle of the text. The mother is drunk, again, and has destroyed the apartment, again, when Pete arrives on the scene and offers to take Maggie away from this and to have good time. The language does not insinuate that this taking away is for good, but for perhaps the afternoon, just a small escape, when her mother says:

“The hell wid him and you,” she said, glowering at her daughter in the gloom. Her eyes seemed to burn balefully. “Yeh’ve gone the deh devil, Mag Johnson, Yehs knows yehs have gone the deh devil. Yer a disgrace
the yer people, damn yeh. An’ now, git out an go ahn wid dat doe-faced jude of yours. Go the hell wid him, damn yeh, an’ a good riddance. Go the hell an’ see how yeh likes it.” (Crane 30)

To begin, it is very obvious that there is either no concept of morality in the mother or that it is blurred and distorted. The mother is completely drunk, constantly in and out of jail and repeatedly makes a spectacle of herself almost on a daily basis. From the position of the reader it would seem that the mother is hysterical, and making no sense. Also, that she completely over reacts to the situation, one in which I find it difficult not to side with Maggie’s desire to escape, and essentially banishes her daughter.

It is here that we see the stark difference between the way the mother should be and the way she is. Specifically, the mother should be a symbol of love, but instead is a symbol of a degraded environment. Walcutt says, “A dominant idea that grows from this landscape of hysteria is that these people are victimized by their ideas of moral propriety which are so utterly inapplicable to their lives that they constitute a social insanity. Maggie is pounced upon by the first wolf in the jungle and seduced” (166). Maggie has not even ‘ruined’ herself, so to speak, because she has yet to do anything with Pete. Her mother would have understood this if she had taken the time to talk with her daughter, instead of viewing the situation through a drunken stupor. Unfortunately for Maggie, this is not the case and her mother has just forced her self into the arms of her seducer.

Interestingly enough, Maggie does not feel that she is a ruined woman at first. It is reported after this incident that Maggie is no longer a virgin and has become dependent on Pete’s affection. “Maggie was pale. From her eyes had been plucked all look of self-reliance. She leaned with a dependent air toward her companion. She was timid, as if
fearing his anger or displeasure. She seemed to beseech tenderness of him” (Crane 38).

This newfound need she has to rely upon Pete is representative of the fact that she has given to Pete her most precious commodity and now her life belonged to him. She goes on to say that her new life seen ‘through rose-colored glasses’ was better than anything that she had ever experienced, and that “she did not feel like a bad woman. To her knowledge she had never seen any better” (Crane 39).

Her sense of morality is not affected in any way, as long as she feels that Pete feels for her as she does for him. In other words, she does not yet understand that she is being used as a commodity of pleasure. La France states it as thus:

her seduction is merely incidental in her progress to awareness because Crane has shifted the focus of her attention from the fact of the seduction to the character of her seducer. Awareness, the climax of Crane’s pattern so far as his protagonist is concerned, finally comes when her illusory image of her lover is destroyed by experience in ch.14 (well after the fact of the seduction. (58)

The reason that she does not feel that she is a bad woman is because she is still too caught up in the moment of her fantasy. It is not until Pete leaves Maggie to chase Nell that Maggie begins to realize that Pete is not who she believed him to be. “Maggie was dazed. She could dimly perceive that something stupendous happened, she wondered why Pete saw fit to remonstrate with the woman, pleading for forgiveness with his eyes. She thought she noted an air of submission about her leonine Pete. She was astounded” (Crane 45). It is at this point that her seduction and her downfall begin to culminate into a vision of reality for her. It is only now that she begins to understand that her dream was
only that, that they world had taken her for a ride. Pleasure sought after for only pleasures sake, would ultimately not be its own reward. Knowing nothing else to do, Maggie goes home.

Her return is used as a structural motif in the way that she becomes a spectacle. It is at this point that all the twisted notions of morality, all the unattained emulation of this class begin to surface. All the morals that none of these characters in the text live by, become their bibles, so to speak, as they preach to Maggie what a horrible sinner they feel she truly is. It is in this scene that we discover that this class has no value code of its own and certainly does not emulate that of any class. The irony of the situation carries all the weight as the reader realizes what a phony sense morality this class has. She stands there in a stupor, taking violent words thrown at her from her neighbors and her mother, until Jimmie arrives. It is only then that she begins to come out of her trance and tries to address her brother. After all, he was the only one who tried to offer her any advice, and he was Pete’s friend. But, he would not stoop to help her in her position, nor see that he might have some responsibility for it. He too is a representation of this class’s superficial sense of morality. Instead, “he drew hastily back from her. ‘Well, now, yer a hell of a t’ing, ain’ yeh?’ he said, his lips curling in scorn. Radiant virtue sat upon his brow and his repelling hands expressed horror of contamination” (Crane 48). Jimmie, as well as every other character present at this scene, feels that somehow they sit high above Maggie on an illusion of morality from which they sit and judge her. Just as in the beginning of the book, when Jimmie was in a fight and everyone was content to watch, now everyone has seen the outcome and are content to judge as if they have no responsibility whatsoever for this poor girl’s fate.
None of the characters of this book seemed to have any realistic view of moral life. The fact that they were content to condemn and preach what they themselves did not practice is proof of this. Janet Overmyer sums up the moral position of each of the main characters when she says:

None of the four main characters sees life clearly and honestly. Pete correctly views his affair with Maggie as a pleasant interlude for him and nothing more, but hopes mightily for a satisfactory relationship with Nell, who sees him as a fool. Jimmie is at a loss to understand his sister’s fall, and, incapable of seeing any relation between his own seduction of various women and Pete’s seduction of his sister, dams his sister mercilessly for thus disgracing the family. Once he ‘almost came to the conclusion that his sister would have been more firmly good had she better known how,’ but he disregards this idea. Neither he nor his mother can understand Maggie’s desire for a better life or see how her environment helped propel her into Pete’s arms. (185)

Not one of the characters is capable of comprehending how this girl’s destruction came about, because all their interiors are as vacant as Maggie’s. Neither her brother, nor her mother can bring themselves to reconcile their daughter and have her come home. It is not until it is too late, and Maggie has killed herself [Gullason Edition], that her mother decides that she wants to forgive her. The mother remains hysterical and unrealistic to the end, carrying on about her daughter’s shoes when she was just a baby. This aspect of her character appears as a lesson to the readers, displaying that a mother could avoid any similar tragedies as long as she looks after the well-being of her child from birth on.
Crane’s attempt to place morality into the swelling masses of the lower class, proves that an innocent child does not stand a chance of fighting off the harsh realities of her environment, without the help of the family. Perhaps if the Johnson family had taken more responsibility in the protection of Maggie’s innocence then the outcome would have been more satisfactory. As it stands, however, Maggie did not have enough sense of the world to make her own informed decisions and it cost her her life. Pizer successfully summarizes this novel when he says:

*Maggie* is thus a novel primarily about the falsity and destructiveness of certain moral codes. To be sure, these codes and their analogous romantic visions of experience are present in Maggie’s environment, and are in part what Crane means when he wrote that environment shapes lives regardless. But Crane’s ironic technique suggest that his primary goal was not to show the effects of environment but to distinguish between moral appearance and reality, to attack the sanctimonious self-deception and sentimental emotional gratification of moral poses. (192)

In other words, although the environment that surrounded Maggie was extremely important, the most relevant aspect of this girl’s destruction was the fact that the society was living within the contexts of a false sense of morality. Although they proclaimed to emulate the moral standards of the middle class, they in fact had no moral standards that they could call their own. Maggie’s family was unable to forgive Maggie, because they were merely posing as moral figures. They did not understand what it meant to be a true moral figure. The case of *Charlotte Temple* proves this point. Charlotte’s parents were willing to forgive their daughter because they correctly assessed that their daughter had
slipped from their protection and found herself in a world that was foreign and
dangerous. They could understand that it was partly their responsibility that this
happened and therefore it was their obligation to help her. Maggie’s family, however,
had no real concept of the world that Maggie was trying to cope with. Both Mary and
Jimmie had a very good idea of what the world was about and could not recognize that
Maggie did not share the same knowledge. They had no understanding and no sympathy
for her innocence, which they did not possess themselves, and as a result not only could
not protect her from ruining her reputation, but could also not sympathize nor forgive her
innocent mistake.
Harriet Jacobs’ Redefinition of True Womanhood

In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*

My discussion of *Charlotte Temple* emphasized the morals and standards of the nineteenth century as they applied to women. These morals depicted women as the only people capable of embodying the virtues and accepted notions of morality for their culture. The significance of this role is the fact that these sets of rules were the moral codes of the middle and upper class sections of society. As seen in chapter two, the lower classes, as a result of their degraded state, could not succeed in properly emulating this status. In fact, they not only failed to emulate, but also failed to revise this standard to fit their level of society. These rules were the benchmark of how women’s behavior should be judged. Virtue, or rather chastity, was considered to be a woman’s most valued possession and without it she would become a ‘fallen woman’ and unfit for marriage.

The tale of Charlotte clearly defined the mores of the period around the time of 1792, the early part of the nineteenth century and their specific focus on the role and obligations of women in that society. Specifically, the most important obligation of a female at this time was to remain virtuous up until the day she was married, when her virtue would then become the rightful property of her husband. Any woman who engaged in sexual activity, and thus loses her virtue, would be ruined for marriage and considered a fallen woman. In a sense, she was ostracized by society and could hope for nothing more than a life of prostitution.

Charlotte suffered the fate of the fallen woman, and the woman who was supposed to protect her cared little for the idea of morality; she, herself, being a fallen
woman. Charlotte was taken outside the protection of her family unit and was not wise enough about the rules of the world to defend herself. In other words, her naivete, or her innocence, were what eventually led to her seduction.

Maggie was to suffer the same fate as Charlotte, because she too was naïve, and had no sense of the 'other,' as defined in chapter one, meaning that she could not recognize that other people were not as concerned about her well-being as she was. Her situation was made all the more devastating, because it appeared that her innocence was compounded with a lack of intelligence. Also, her family situation was not nearly as strong or as supportive as Charlotte’s. Charlotte’s family had the means and the desire to look after their daughter, and were even willing and eager to have her returned home despite any condition that she may have been in. Maggie’s environment, on the other hand, had neither. Her story was an in depth look at how a lower class environment made the deterioration of morality easy. In fact, Crane went one step further and proved that in Maggie’s case her environment was so degraded that it was impossible to even attempt to apply the nineteenth-century standard of morals to her situation. Her family ridiculed her and abandoned her for purely hypocritical reasons, because they expected her to abide by a set of standards that the lower classes were incapable of emulating.

Therefore, it would appear thus far that nineteenth-century standards of morality and virtue, as concerning women, can only rightly be applied to the class that created them, meaning middle or upper class. Women in the lower class live in such deplorable conditions that they are introduced to sin and pleasure at such an early age of development that they never have the opportunity to learn to want something more elevated. Also, the lower classes, at least as depicted by Crane were so ignorant that they
do not choose a standard that rightfully fits their society. It becomes the question then, can a woman who is outside of the class system, because she is a slave and therefore considered to be property, uphold any standard of morality? It will be seen in this chapter that Linda Brent, knowing she cannot escape the perils of seduction that exist in her state, creates for herself a standard that she can be comfortable with. This standard involves putting the aspects of piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity that defined the cult of True Womanhood. In Jacobs' redefinition of this ideology she manipulates the purity and submissive aspects to mean remaining pure and submissive only for a man of her choosing and not any man who simply claims ownership of her.

The novel, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, written by Harriet Jacobs in 1861 is the story of Linda Brent (Jacobs) who was a slave in the nineteenth century. In her novel, she relates the efforts of her master to seduce her, and her attempts to resist. She addresses throughout her desire to remain virtuous, according to the standards of the time. Her novel is written in such a manner as to have many similarities with that of *Charlotte Temple*. To begin they both are written in the style of the sentimental novel, both have narrative interruptions within them as the narrator attempts to address a moral issue and both attempt to convey some type of moral message or lesson. But can a woman, who has no class in society, be judged by the same laws and conventions of that society or is she outside the conventional perimeters? This chapter will attempt to prove that being outside the class system as Brent was, Jacobs has adopted the values of the class she wishes to emulate while simultaneously adjusting them to fit her particular circumstances. She successfully justifies why it is that she cannot succeed and therefore not only proves that these standards do not apply to her, but takes it one step further and
essentially creates a new standard for black women of the time. Jacobs is not a unique case solely because she is a slave, but also because she is not like Charlotte or Maggie, who were naïve and innocent. Jacobs is very informed about the dynamics of her environment. She realizes her status as property and what this ultimately means in regards to the master/slave relationship. In fact, it is because of her intelligence that she is able to manipulate her experience to ultimately be advantageous to her.

As mentioned above, Jacobs wrote under the pseudonym of Linda Brent. The fact that she was a woman and a slave raised questions about the story’s authenticity. Her using a name other than her own also added to questions of veracity about her tale. It was obvious that Jacobs understood this point, because she goes to great lengths in the introduction and the preface to explain her position, as well as her ability to write.

Her editor, in the introduction, as a white woman, attempts to establish Jacobs’s authority as a writer by saying:

It will naturally excite surprise that a woman reared in slavery should be able to write so well. But circumstances will explain this. In the first place, nature endowed her with quick perceptions. Secondly, the mistress, with whom she lived till she was twelve years old, was a kind, considerate friend, who taught her to read and spell. (Jacobs xi)

This explanation justifies how Jacobs gained her talents in letters. Also, it serves the double purpose of attracting the attention of the intended audience, white women of the North, for if a white woman is an advocate of the story, this serves as justification for its acceptance. Up until this point, then, the only experience that the whites have come to understand about slavery has been primarily the male experience. Because literature at
this time was judged by white patriarchal standards, any work done by a woman created a necessity to justify its authenticity.

The fact that this story is supported by a white female is, in fact, very crucial to the acceptance of this story. Although other slave narratives have been written around this time, such as Frederick Douglass', there were not many written by women. Hazel Carby states, "Male standards of authenticity do not allow for female specific narrations to be authentic because they do not deal with male issues, but female specific issues" (46). By this she means that the men who created literary standards and judged works by that standard could not relate to any text that focused specifically upon female experience, and therefore doubted its authenticity. A story about a woman could not be considered representational of all experience, because it only dealt with the minority and neglected the standard male point of view. Carby goes on to state, "Any assumption of the representativeness of patriarchal experience does not allow for or even regard as necessary, a gender-specific form of analysis" (46). Therefore, slave narratives written at this time, mostly by male ex-slaves, should stand to represent the entire slave experience, and a view of the situation from a female perspective is not necessary.

These earlier representations of the slave experience, by men, did help to shed some light upon the atrocities of the "peculiar institution." The men who wrote did seem to have a sense that the women suffered a different and far more tragic form of persecution. However, sympathy for their situation does not necessarily equal understanding of their situation. Judith Fetterly addresses this issue by saying, "Although an awareness of the particular difficulties that afflicted female slaves and in particular of the sexual exploitation of black women by white men, appears frequently in the
narratives written by men, in none of them is the experience made central” (281). It would appear then that there has not been any adequate representation of the female slave around the period of the 1860s.

Jacobs seems to have understood this dilemma, because she addresses it in her introduction. Much like the introduction of Charlotte Temple, the author takes the time to explain her intentions for writing. She explains:

I have not written my experiences in order to attract attention to myself; on the contrary, it would have been more pleasant to me to have been silent about my history. Neither do I care to excite sympathy for my own sufferings. But I do earnestly desire to arouse the women of the North to a realizing sense of the condition of two millions of women at the South, still in bondage, suffering what I suffered, and most of them far worse. (xiii-xiv)

This statement accomplishes many things. First, it works to establish Jacobs as a representative of slave women, by expressing that her situation is not a unique one to the women of her culture. She makes it very clear that other women have suffered the same situations, if not worse. Second, she attempts to establish a bond between the white women of the North and their black sisters of the South. This connection between the women is crucial if there is to be any sentiments aroused to their predicament. If the women of the North do not feel any particular alliance with those of the South, then this story will not only fall on deaf ears, but more likely would not be read or heard at all. Third, this statement establishes that the author is very knowledgeable about the life and the world in which she lives. Unlike Charlotte, who was naïve and therefore easy to take
advantage of, Jacobs is perfectly aware of the danger she faces every day and the lengths she must go to to preserve her nature and her virtue.

This connection between women is central to the understanding and the breaking down of the moral code. If Jacobs is nothing more than a mere slave and therefore property, then there would be no need for a moral standard. However, if she is viewed as a female and therefore subject to the same standards as her sisters in the North, then it would be essential for these sisters to understand her position. It is through this understanding that Jacobs can redefine the standard in her own terms. Carby assess this position by saying, "Jacobs established that hers was the voice of a representative black female slave, and in a contemporary interpretation this appeal is defined as an appeal to the sisterhood of all women" (50). She goes on to elaborate that, "Jacobs’s appeal was to a potential rather than an actual bonding between white and black women. To place white female readers in the position of having to realize their implication in the oppression of black women" (51). Although the appeal may have been to a potential bond, by simply naming that bond white women of the North could not escape their own sympathies and then Jacobs consequently accomplishes her goal of attracting the audience that she seeks.

The period of the nineteenth century was very concerned with the idea of femininity and the qualities that the ideal female should possess. However, this standard only took into consideration white females. Angela Davis says, "Judged by the evolving nineteenth century ideology of femininity, which emphasized women’s roles as nurturing mothers and gentle companions and housekeepers for their husbands, black women were practically anomalies" (5). If these black women were judged by the same standards then
slave owners would be forced to admit that their slaves were not only human women, but were mothers as well. This posed a serious problem, because then there would be no choice but to judge them by the same standards. This necessity was avoided by separating pregnancy itself from any concept of morality. In other words, standards were not set according to pregnancy, but virtue, to which black women were already considered not to possess.

It was obvious that these women were becoming pregnant, by their owners or other white men. Deborah Gray White says, "Female slavery had much to do with work, but much of it was concerned with bearing, nourishing, and rearing children whom slaveholders needed for the continual replenishment of their labor force" (69). In her opinion women were not mothers they were baby-making machines. Davis confirms this reality by relating, "ideological exaltation of motherhood- as popular as it was during the nineteenth century- did not extend to slaves. In fact, in the eyes of the slaveholders, slave women were not mothers at all; they were simply instruments guaranteeing the growth of the slave labor force" (7). Thus, black slave women were only property used to keep slavery in existence. It is easy to understand then that Flint’s desire to ‘own’ Brent may not have come so much from being sexually attracted to her, as it was a desire to increase his slave population.

It then becomes the question of how this became possible. Were black women simply giving their bodies over to their masters or other men who wished to have their way with them? It does not appear as if that were the case. These slave women were being raped and manipulated by their masters, with no help or chance of protection from anyone. "Sexual abuse is the most frequently mentioned problem. The Victorian
standards of the age made it necessary to be less graphic about sexual violations than about other subjects” (Foster 109). It was not bad enough that these occurrences were taking place. What made it worse was that the times deemed it less than tactful to even address the situation. Foster goes on to say, “According to the slave narrator, no slave woman’s virtue was assured and no man could offer security” (109). This was a situation from which no slave woman could hope to be freed. It became part of the dynamics of the institution of slavery, and Jacobs brought this to bear on the public. Fetterly makes the point, “determined to break this silence and to force the issue of sexual slavery into consciousness and significance, Jacobs focuses her narrative on her struggle to escape rape” (282). Unlike Charlotte and Maggie, who had the difficult task of trying not to be seduced by another man and therefore becoming “fallen” because they acted upon their own desires for physical pleasure, Jacobs had the even more difficult task of knowing the dangers that existed in her own environment and trying desperately to remain virtuous.

For it was even the owners themselves that felt that reproduction was essential to the survival of their system and “if a slave woman attempted to preserve her sexual autonomy, the economic system of slavery was threatened” (Carby 54-55). It becomes very obvious that the slave girl has a set of rules and understandings unique to her own situation. Jacobs’s story is revolutionary in the respect that in a time when sex of any nature was not discussed in an open forum, she chose to force people to realize the conditions under which she struggled to survive.

As was stated, the rules of the slave girl were very unique. Jacobs makes an attempt to explain some of the dynamics to her readers. She declares in her preface that she has not “exaggerated the wrongs inflicted by slavery” (xiii). This perhaps serves the
purpose of forcing the reader to realize that they are about to read experiences that cross the line of delicacy. For example, early on she describes a scene of a mother being torn from her son. This serves the purpose of establishing that slave women have no control over anything in their environment, even whether or not they are allowed to keep their own children. "Could you have seen that mother clinging to her child, when they fastened the irons upon his wrists; could have heard her heart-rending groans, and could have seen her bloodshot eyes wander wildly from face to face, vainly pleading for mercy; could you have witnessed that scene as I saw it, you would exclaim, Slavery is damnable" (22). It is important that this scene should be about a mother losing her child, because then white women might be able to put themselves in that position and might be able to grasp some sense of the depth of the pain that slave woman felt. In other words, their sympathies would be more aroused. Jacobs also establishes that even at her tender age of fourteen, her eyes learn of the horror the world contains. But that horror is not merely contained within the bounds of family loss, to which the men must also be forced to suffer. A woman’s torture goes on to include so much more. Later, she explains what it is like for a young slave girl to grow up:

The slave girl is reared in an atmosphere of licentiousness and fear. The lash and the foul talk of her master and his sons are her teachers. When he is fourteen or fifteen, her owner or his sons, or the overseer, or perhaps all of them, begin to bribe her with presents. If these fail to accomplish their purpose, she is whipped or starved into submission to their will. She may have had religious principles inculcated by some pious mother or grandmother, or some good mistress; she may have a lover whose good
opinion and peace of mind are dear to her heart; or the profligate men who have power over her may be exceedingly odious to her. But resistance is helpless. (51-52)

This is the future of the slave girl. The men appear as vultures waiting for the right time to come down and swoop up their prey. As far as Jacobs is concerned slavery might be equated to hell. “It makes the white fathers cruel and sensual; the sons violent and licentious; it contaminates the daughters, and makes the wives wretched. And as for the colored race, it needs an abler pen than mine to describe the extremity of their suffering, the depths of their degradation” (53). One might wonder how anyone survived such a system. But Jacobs did escape. Ironically enough, her idea of morality founds its roots in the conventions of the times.

Carby recognized, in her analysis, that Jacobs was struggling with the conventional ideals of the time. She said, “Jacobs used the material circumstances of her life to critique conventional standards of female behavior and to question their relevance and applicability to the experience of black women” (47). Jacobs respected the idea of virtue and wished to apply such a standard to herself; however, with the situation being what it was, this was almost impossible. She was very well informed about her surroundings and held no naive illusions as to her circumstances. As Jacobs says, “I had not lived fourteen years in slavery for nothing. I had felt, seen, and heard enough, to read the characters, and question the motives, of those around me. The war of my life had begun, and though one of God’s most powerless creatures, I resolved never to be conquered” (17). This decision came about, because her master had begun the process of
trying to seduce her. He had begun trying to make her believe essentially that she had
no worth of her own, that she was owned by him and therefore should give herself over to
him and allow him to have his way. "When he told me that I was made for his use, made
to obey his command in every thing, that I was nothing but a slave, whose will must and
should surrender to his, never before had my puny arm felt so strong" (16). She
obviously had some sense of her self worth or value, according to the standards of the
time. So much so, in fact, that weak as she felt herself to be in her position, she was more
than willing not only to put up a fight for her life, but more specifically, for her virtue.
Although her sense of virtue coincides with the ideals of the time, her sense of defiance is
a direct contradiction. As Carby puts it, "The spirit of defiance characterized Jacobs’s
representations of all Linda Brent’s encounters with her master. Conventional feminine
qualities of submission and passivity were replaced by an active resistance. Thus, Jacobs
developed an alternative set of definitions of womanhood and motherhood in the text
which remained in tension with the cult of true womanhood" (56). This defiance seemed
the result of Jacobs’ desire to establish herself as a woman. She could not be submissive
nor passive or she would lose her sense of herself. The outcome of her defiance was a set
of rules unique to her situation, blending values of white society with recognized
limitations of those standards due to slavery.

The attempts of seduction began by her master when Jacobs was only fourteen.
By the time she turned fifteen, he had increased his attempts on the girl. Jacobs says:

I now entered on my fifteenth year- a sad epoch in the life of a slave girl.

My master began to whisper foul words in my ear. Young as I was, I
could not remain ignorant of their import. I tried to treat them with
indifference and contempt. The master's age, my extreme youth, and the fear that his conduct would be reported to my grandmother, made him bear this treatment for many months. (26)

This passage is important because it shows that Jacobs's standards were those of innocence and delicacy. She was in no way tempted to respond to the ploys of her master, because she is trying to follow the moral standards of white society and refusing to accept the socially established position of black, female slaves. She is responding like a lady and he is treating her as though she was no more than a piece of flesh waiting to be devoured. She goes on to explain that "he peopled my young mind with unclean images, such as only a vile monster could think of" (26). Although, Jacobs might be the slave and technically sub-human according to the standards of the peculiar institution, it is her master, Dr. Flint, who is acting like a monster.

It would appear from the perspective of slave women, that men at this time found themselves to be exempt from any standards of moral character. They deemed morality the responsibility of their women, and this seemed to leave them in a position of freedom to act in any way they chose toward women. It would matter little that the slave would choose to be a virtuous person the man, having power over her situation, will soon render virtue an impossibility. Jacobs attacks these men saying, "... no matter whether the slave girl be as black as ebony or as fair as her mistress. In either case, there is no shadow of law to protect her from insult, from violence, or even from death; all these are inflicted by fiends who bear the shape of men" (26).
Realizing that her master might soon grow impatient with simply whispering words that would corrupt her mind, Linda set herself to find an escape from him. Foster explains that, "After her master had attempted many assaults upon her virtue, Brent decided that as a female slave she would not be allowed to remain a virgin or to marry whom she chose and live as a respectable woman" (58). It is unfortunate that in her own eyes she had the potential and desire to be a respectable woman, but the reality of the situation was that she was not allowed to stay a virgin. The day would come when a man would snatch it from her.

In attempts to remain a respectable woman, Jacobs repeatedly rejects the overtures of her master and proposes to her master that she marry a free black man. She tells her master that she loves this man. The master immediately becomes enraged and begins to insult her and her race, calling her love nothing more than a puppy. To which she responds, "if he is a puppy I am a puppy for we are both of the negro race. It is right and honorable for us to love each other. The man you call a puppy never insulted me, sir; and he would not love me if he did not believe me to be a virtuous woman." He sprang upon me like a tiger, and gave me a stunning blow. It was the first time he struck me" (38). It is more likely that the blow she received was a direct result of her speaking as though she is a member of his society and not a piece of his property. This passage also serves another purpose, which is to establish once again the ridiculousness of her trying to live up to the moral laws of the times as they were for women. Fetterly addresses this point saying, "On the one hand, she engaged the issue directly, pointing out the absurdity and the injustice of expecting black slave women to live by the moral and behavioral code applied to free white women. On the other hand, she emphasized those aspects of
her experience that were congruent with the value system of her audience and thus to lessen he distance between them” (282). Again we see that through her resistance to be seduced, Jacobs is establishing an alternative set of moral codes. Her code differs in the respect that she decides she is a woman, despite the fact that society deems her property. Because she acknowledges herself as a woman, she attempts to live by virtuous standards, which include the refusal of physical pleasure before marriage. However, since she is denied marriage, that point is adjusted to mean until she can take a love of her own choosing. It is in this respect that she creates a new cult of womanhood, because she is employing free will, something the female members of white society are not so capable of employing.

Jacobs finally realized, from the last episode, that there was never going to be a chance for her to get married. These issues were all brought to bear in her tale, and the women who read her story were forced to face the reality of Jacobs’s situation. She must at all costs find a protector or she will be forced to succumb to her persecutor. She goes to great lengths to express her knowledge that her decision did not bring her much joy. She is also very concerned with how the women who read this will view her. She realized that at her tender age she had been subject to learn of the evils that exist in her world and now she would only prove herself naïve if she were to ignore this truth. Having a complete understanding of her situation, she realizes that there are only two choices, either give in to her master or seek a protector. She decides that she would rather have the choice over who takes her chastity and therefore chooses a protector, a free white male, hoping also that one day he may free any children that they might have. She explains her situation and her decision as thus:
It seems less degrading to give one's self, than to submit to compulsion.

There is something akin to freedom in having a lover who has no control over you, except that which he gains by kindness and attachment.

Moreover, the wrong does not seem so great with an unmarried man, as with one who has a wife to be made unhappy, but the condition of slaves confuses all principles of morality, and, in fact, renders the practice of them impossible. (55)

She admits to realizing that any lover taken out of wedlock is a reduction in her standards as a woman; however, she also makes it perfectly clear that this is not truly relevant to her situation, because she has no chance of marrying anyone and living a respectable life. This is the best that she can possibly hope for in her condition. Jacobs uses this aspect of her condition to make a valuable point. Karen Sanchez-Eppler explains it the best, when she says, “Linda’s stress on the wrongful humiliation of her past actions conforms to the moral code of her happy and virtuous readers. Yet though she asks for their pity and their pardon, she also repeatedly and explicitly disqualifies them and their code of sexual morality for the task of judgement” (99). Charlotte and Maggie both had to suffer the judgement of society, because they were part of that culture and hence subject to its rules. Jacobs’, on the other hand, is neither.

Jacobs is saying loud and clear that she has the desire to live by the code set for all women under the ideals of the time, or the Cult of True Womanhood, but makes it equally clear that such demands are impossible to meet in her condition of bondage. Fetterly says, “for a woman to write openly of her sexual history in itself constituted a violation of powerful nineteenth-century conventions. But the particular content of
Jacobs’s sexual history placed her even further outside the bounds of what was conventionally acceptable to her primarily white and primarily female audience" (281). It might be stated that by forcing white women to read the truth of the situation of their black counterparts, Jacobs’s is raising the standard for the entire sex. She is forcing her white sisters to realize that it is not as cut and dried as their standards would have them believe, for her particular situation, and those of her fellow slaves, is not one that is even remotely familiar to white women. If Jacobs is to be accepted by these women, they must concede this fact, and if they do, they acknowledge that Jacobs, as well as the other slave women, are in fact women trying desperately to live virtuous lives. Possibly, this could be taken one step further, in that white women could develop sympathy for the black women, because they do have one thing in common and that being that it is the men that control the dynamics and the boundaries of this moral code and they expand it or contract it to fit their own desires for pleasure. Therefore, women of both races are trapped within this paradigm.

I have been trying to make the argument that Jacobs exists both in, by her own choice, and out, because of slavery, of the conventions of the nineteenth century. Carby defends this notion by explaining, “The narrator declared in a direct address to her readers that the remembrance of this period in her ‘unhappy life’ filled her with ‘sorrow and shame’ and made no reference to sexual satisfaction, love, or passion, as such feelings were not meant to be experienced or encouraged outside of marriage and were rarely figured to exist within” (58). It is completely necessary for Jacobs to go into depth about her sexual condition. Without this discussion it would be impossible for her readers to understand the position that she is in and the struggle she has to try to make the
best decision, but more importantly to establish her urgency in her need to survive. As sad as that time period may have been for her, the decision that she came to was her own decision. No choices were taken away from her, despite how she may have suffered throughout her consequences. In this respect, she is trying to bring to light the conflicted nature of her environment.

Sanchez-Eppler finds that this tactic can prove useful to Jacobs. She says, “But such degradations may, nevertheless prove tactful. Jacobs’s conflation of sex and writing establishes both her sexual story and her telling of it as acts of defiance, as a means of resisting – however inadequately – the oppressions, even the sexual oppressions, of slavery” (104). Jacobs uses this experience of her life as a lesson in slavery and all its degradations. Also, through these explanations of her trials, Jacobs succeeds in establishing a place for herself and all her black sisters within the context of true womanhood. She forces the opening wider, so that there may be room for them all.

The room she creates and the ideology that comes out of it, is that black women can to some degree still remain virtuous women. The rules must be changed to accept them. Carby says,

Jacobs, as author, confronted an ideology that denied her very existence as a black woman and as a mother, and, therefore, she had to formulate a set of meanings that implicitly and fundamentally questioned the basis of true womanhood. Incidents demystified a convention that appeared as the obvious, commonsense rules of behavior and revealed the concept of true womanhood, not a lived set of social relations as she exposed its inherent contradictions and inapplicability to her life. (49)
This concept of true womanhood that was revealed was nothing more than the understanding, that despite social standing, any woman who desired to be virtuous could succeed in being so. Maggie failed in her environment, but that seemed mostly due to lack of sense and desire. She never expressed any desire to be a virtuous woman. Charlotte failed for much the same reason. She was too naïve to know any better. In Jacobs’s condition, she understood perfectly well what it meant to be a respectable woman. Her family, and specifically her grandmother, had taught her well what it meant. Therefore the cult of true womanhood was the concentration of a woman to live a virtuous life. None of the other standards or conventions really applied any longer, they were mere shadows standing behind this fact, which Jacobs helped to shed light upon.

Jacobs has proven in her narrative that not only were black females women, despite what culture, under the guidance of men, deemed them to be. She even took it one step further and proved that her race of women could succeed in being just as virtuous as their Northern, whiter, counterparts despite the extreme adversity that they faced. Fetterly states, “Amazingly enough, Jacobs’s narrative records a story of successful resistance. This success must be attributed at least in part to the presence in her life of a strong ‘mother’ capable of nourishing her. Jacobs’s maternal grandmother is a woman defined by her struggle to protect and maintain her family” (283). Even the grandmother, speaks to prove the fact that no matter what rules or restrictions might be placed upon women by men during this period of time, women, if they so desire, will still live a life defined by their own rules. These set of rules manage to break the convention of the times and help all women to realize that they have their own ideology, outside that
of the one men place upon them, that of true womanhood, and within it all women have a place, even black women.
The Ornamental Ideal in Wharton’s *House of Mirth*

In Edith Wharton’s *House of Mirth*, 1905, we are introduced to the character of Lily Bart. In the beginning, she is a fickle selfish child who desperately attempts to hold onto a lifestyle that increasingly becomes impossible to have. Since her mother raised her in an atmosphere of luxury, she has become incapable of reconciling herself to any other form of existence. Wharton depicts her as a sympathetic character who has been raised to see life only one way and then was left orphaned before she was secured in that lifestyle or taught to live another way. Because of this she is abandoned in the end by her society. Her society ultimately condemns her and casts her out because she refuses to abide by the rules that all the other members of society must abide by. It is not a personal grievance against Lily, it is merely a case of social convention or of following the rules in order to secure the safety and existence of the culture of the rich.

Although Lily did begin the novel as a selfish child, there were turning points that signified the development of Lily's growth. The first stage was when she first took the money from Trenor. At the time she thought the money was her own that she was spending, but she was still aware that having another man's husband speculate for her was not appropriate. Another turning point is when Lily had to live with Gerty for a period of time. It was while she was closely associated with Gerty that she became involved in charity work and realized how good someone cold feel if they laid aside their own selfishness in order that they might help someone else. The final turning point was when she looked upon the face of the baby. It was then that she realized that life could offer so much more than a place in society that must be achieved by struggle.
Perhaps it is because Lily cannot secure herself a position in her society that she holds on so tightly to wanting to belong. As the story progresses, Lily begins to realize that her culture is corrupt and oppressive in its own way, but it is too late for she is fully seduced by the idea of being an ornament among the rich and admired for her beauty. It is not until the end of the novel that Lily realizes that she should not have tried so hard for the society of the rich. She begins to have an understanding of herself as an independent individual, but it is too late, because she doesn’t know how to live as one. She has found that in the eyes of Selden she can see herself clearly, but because she is trying to be someone she is not, she cannot bring herself to be with Selden too often. The reason for this, specifically, is that Selden is always present at key moments of her development, serving the purpose of marker in her slow movement toward recognition. Having Selden near her reminds her of how unhappy she is with herself and her position. Also, Selden is ideally the man she would marry if she were to marry for love, but Selden is poor in the eyes of the rich and therefore causes Lily double pain, because he cannot advance her cause socially.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, upper class society viewed women as objects, possessions to be obtained. Just as Maggie attempts to emulate the moral standards of the class above her own, Lily attempts to emulate the lifestyle of the rich, attempting to have it appear as though she belongs. Women who were attractive and or who were worth large amounts of money were considered to be a status symbol for men of this time period. They were also considered to be very weak and therefore needy of the protection of their mates. Women were growing less and less pleased by this arrangement, because they wished to exert their own powers, take care of their own
selves. Linda Wagner-Martin addresses this issue saying, “In both England and the United States, many women were dissatisfied with their roles during the later part of the nineteenth century. Women of wealth wanted more than to be “protected,” but “the long golden Edwardian garden-party,” with its emphasis on women as beautiful, innocent objects, the desirable icons of an acquisitive patriarchal culture, only reinforced the idea that women needed to be taken care of” (1). Women really had no choice, because it was the men who made the money in their culture, the men who made those rules, and the rules said that women were to be taken care of.

This put women in an uncomfortable situation, because for all intents and purposes, they were parasites, specifically the women of upper class, whose role it was to simply spend the money that their mate has made. Olive Schreiner has this to say about this topic:

Again and again in the history of the past, when among human creatures a certain stage of material civilisation has been reached, a curious tendency has manifested itself for the human female to become more or less parasitic; social conditions tend to rob her of all forms of active, conscious, social labour, and to reduce her, like the field-tick, to passive exercise of her sex functions alone. (293)

These women have no avenue or outlet left to them. They are not allowed to work by the dictates of their culture, which forces them to rely on men for their income.

Unfortunately, in order to obtain this income, they must seek a husband who can provide for them, which means their only active engagement in labor for their whole lives is the search for a husband. It goes without saying that these attempts at matches very rarely
had anything to do with love, but focused primarily on money and therefore, a woman tried to procure for herself, with the help of her family, the richest man that she could find. As a result of this nuance of the culture, the culture itself developed some interesting and unique habits.

There were certain rules and games that had to be played. For example, as in all the other classes of society at this time, a woman’s only assurance for landing a husband revolved around her chastity. According to Wagner-Martin, “the true woman was sexually naïve and pure; virginity was a requirement for any socially approved marriage, and the course of a woman’s life was to be self-sacrifice for the good of the family unit” (2). She then goes on to add that, “in forming what became known as the “double standard of behavior,” society recognized that men could do whatever they wanted in relation to women; after all, they controlled the economic power” (2). This aspect of the dynamics of the relationship can be seen throughout this thesis. Men did indeed control women on this level and as a result treated them however they saw fit.

This aspect of the society is standard for all classes; however, in the upper class, once a woman was married, she was allowed more freedom in the respect that she did not always need to remain faithful to her husband. The result of marriages put together by money was the fact that often times the married couple did not get along or did not even like one another. Because of this they would find excuses, such as parties, to associate themselves with other men and women of their class. In essence, married men and women would create means to flirt or even to have affairs with other married men and women. Edith Wharton, in her story, puts it that, “the code of Lily’s world decreed that a woman’s husband should be the only judge of her conduct: she was technically above
suspicion while she had the shelter of his approval, or even his indifference” (82). In other words, as long as the situation did not seem to be so blatant as to provoke a scandal, the husband usually would pretend that he either didn’t know or didn’t care about his wife’s extra-marital experiences. This was also a common occurrence on the part of the men, as well. In fact, it was a tradition in their culture. The big parties and excursions were a type of staged distractions in which married couples could escape from the confines and watchful eyes of their mates.

The marriages of the leisure class revolved around the women using their sexual prowess to secure for herself a wealthy mate. Charlotte Perkins Gilman says it very well, when she states, “Where young boys plan for what they will achieve and attain, young girls plan for whom they will achieve and attain” (290). It is the women who must set about putting marriage speculations into motion. It is a way or a means of establishing power, for the higher up the economic scale a girl marries into, the more power she receives in society. Allen F. Stein states, “Marriage in Lily’s circle is, Lindberg notes, “primarily a means of securing social power.” Married, Lily could with impunity do those things that lead ultimately to her destruction when she does them as a single woman” (232). Here again we see that women who are married have a certain protection offered to them in society, which works as a buffer or a shield against any immoral actions, they might choose to have. As long as these acts are carried out under the umbrella of a marriage, there is no repercussion but perhaps a slight murmur or whisper. There is never any worry that these actions might be brought to bear and a scandal created. Because most of the couples married each other for money or status or both, the man and the woman usually left one another alone to lead their own lives, and kept silent
about each others extra-curricular activities, as long as their actions did not bring
negative attention to the relationship.

Interesting enough, this ability to attract a mate, as stated earlier, revolves around
an ability in sexual attraction. As Gilman remarks, “Since women are viewed wholly as
creatures of sex even by one another, since everything is done to add to their young
powers of sex-attraction; since they are marriageable solely on this ground, unless,
indeed, a ‘fortune’ has been added to their charms, failure to marry is held a clear proof
of failure to attract, a lack of sex value” (292). Women are brought up in this education.

In a conversation between Lily and Selden, that takes place in the opening scenes of the
narrative they examine the specifics of this dynamic.

He says, ‘Isn’t marriage your vocation? Isn’t it what you’re brought up for?’

She sighed. ‘I suppose so. What else is there?’(10)

Both the man and the woman in this conversation are very clear about the dynamics of
the culture, which is that a woman is raised for the sole purpose of attracting a husband
for herself. It would seem that women, in this respect lack all free will, because they
have little or no other outlet. Stein says of Lily, that she “is presented throughout as so
victimized by her training that she virtually lacks free will” (231). All the women seem
to suffer from the same disease and are very aware of the pressure placed on them to
marry and not so much for the protection of the family unit, but more for their own
survival and protection. As a result of this, women will conspire with one another to help
their friends trap the mate that they are after.

This was certainly the case at Bellemont, where Lily was attempting to secure a
marriage with Percy Gryce. She has let her friend Judy know that she is seeking to obtain
Gryce. “In consequence of this hint, Lily found herself the centre of that feminine solicitude which envelops a young woman in the mating season. A solitude was tacitly created for her in the crowded existence of Bellemont, and her friends could not have shown a greater readiness for self-effacement had her wooing been adorned with all the attributes of romance” (Wharton 39). Women of this culture will conspire to help one another win the match that they seek. However, it is also important to note that there is no romance involved in this wooing. These women are looking at marriage as if they were a financial endeavor, which will hopefully prove to be profitable.

Perhaps it is because of this that Lily cannot allow herself to commit to a marriage. She is twenty-nine years old at the beginning of the story and is still a virgin. She is still in the market for a husband and although she may have been made many offers, she has not closed the deal, so to speak. She is a very good looking girl and had many talents in being able to control a situation and recognize that she is the center of attention. For example, on the occasion of the Bry’s public debut, Lily had the opportunity to represent herself as a living work of art. She chose for herself a piece that would allow her own natural curves and beauty to be the center of attention. As a result, Ned Van Alstyne, a member of their society, remarked, “When a girl’s a good looking as that she’d better marry; then no questions are asked. In our imperfectly organized society there is no provision as yet for the young woman who claims the privileges of marriage without assuming its obligations” (Wharton124). The point that he is trying to make is that Lily is flaunting her body in public, and what is worse is that she is doing it without the protection of a husband to stop people from commenting on her, and openly viewing her as a sexual object. Although it may be a woman’s role at this time to be a sexual
object and use her skills to gain a man, one of the paradoxes of the culture is that under
no circumstances should anyone have cause openly to draw attention to this fact. Being
single, Lily is placing herself in a difficult situation, and what is worse is that she is not
unaware of her predicament, because she has not heard what anyone has said behind her
back. She is only aware of the compliments paid to her face. This passage is also
interesting in the way it reveals Lily’s character at the time of this scene and anticipates
her development as a person.

Carol Wershoven explains,

To show her own beauty Lily has dispensed with a sumptuous setting and
has become purely herself, the ‘real’ Lily. Lily thus is a character who ill
not fit into her environment but who is, because of her difference, more
admirable. The scene anticipates the second half of the novel, in which
Lily gradually stripped of the ‘distracting accessories’ of luxurious
surroundings, will become more outcast, and therefore more herself. (49)

The implication here is that Lily is just a person with no free will as long as she succumbs
to the dictates of her surroundings. It is only when society begins to abandon her that she
comes to realize herself as a person.

Lily, in the beginning of the novel attempts to explain to Selden why it is that she
is still Miss Bart. “She shook her head wearily. “I threw away one or two good chances
when I first came out- I suppose every girl does; and you know I am horribly poor- and
very expensive. I must have a great deal of money” (Wharton10). She is trying to
establish to Selden that she is in love with the culture that she finds herself in, but cannot
commit herself to adapt to its rules. Later, it is said of her:
She had so long been accustomed to pass from one country-house to another, till the close of the holidays brought her friends to town, that the unfilled gaps of time confronting her produced a sharp sense of waning popularity. It was as she had said to Selden—people were tired of her. They would welcome her in a new character, but as Miss Bart they knew her by heart. (79)

Part of the rules of her culture were that enjoyment of its many distractions were contingent upon being married. As Ned Van Alstyne stated, one could not expect to enjoy its more pleasurable aspects if they were not willing to commit to what it took to enjoy those pleasures. Also, it is important to note that this quote represents the seriousness of her situation, namely, that as a single woman Lily is still considered a commodity and as such was quickly losing value.

Unfortunately, her culture is beginning to lose its enjoyment of her. "To the end that, if she does not succeed in being chosen, she becomes a thing of mild popular contempt, a human being with no further place in life save as an attaché, a dependent upon more fortunate relatives, an old maid" (Gilman 291). Lily finds that she does not want to have to give up the enjoyment of society, but that alone she cannot survive for much longer. She simply cannot afford it, financially or socially. She realizes that, "[She's] been about too long-people are getting tired of [her]; they are beginning to say that [she] ought to marry" (10). But, she cannot bring herself to do so. She is frustrated by the fact that she cannot remain in her lifestyle and remain independent at the same time.

In the beginning of the novel she expresses to Selden:
Ah, there's the difference – a girl must, a man may if he chooses[...]. If I were shabby no one would have me; a woman is asked out as much for her clothes as for herself[...]. we are expected to be pretty and well-dressed till we drop - and if we can't keep it up alone, we have to go into partnership.

(12)

Here again she expects the pleasure of wearing fine clothes and looking spectacular, but her income cannot afford it and therefore she finds herself relying on family and friends, who are growing increasingly bored of her as a burden. Lily's problem is that she does not have a solid grasp of her situation. She is both fickle and childlike and because of this, she cannot bring herself to recognize her reality. She still holds on to the idea of a husband who will also be a financial savior. However, she cannot reconcile herself to the fact that she does not want a man to define her, as marriage would, she wants to remain independent, but simply can't afford to. The result of this is that she realizes that she must find a husband to support her, whether she wants one or not.

Lily sets about trying to land Gryce as her husband, all the while knowing that he bores her to death. "She had been bored all afternoon by Percy Gryce, but she could not ignore him on the morrow, she must follow up her success, must submit to more boredom, must be ready with fresh compliances and adaptabilities, and all on the bare chance that he might ultimately decide to do her the honour of boring her for life" (23). She is truly forced to treat this situation as if it were a dance that could easily double as a battle. She must plot and scheme, advance and retreat, in order to secure a future for herself. She realizes that at this time a male cousin of hers finds himself in a similar circumstance, in that he too is poor and trying to land himself a rich mate. One day she
observes him in action and finds herself getting frustrated at the thought that his job was actually so much easier than hers, but that he acts as if he is truly working hard.

"'How impatient men are!' Lily reflected. "All Jack has to do to get everything he wants is to keep quiet and let that girl marry him; Whereas I have to calculate and contrive, retreat and advance, as if I were going through an intricate dance, where one mistep would throw me hopelessly out of time'" (40). Unfortunately, this is exactly what happens, because the next day she does not spend with Gryce and a member of their set fills his ear with rumors of Lily’s habits, which send him running and she has lost him for good.

The question then becomes, why is it that Lily is unable to marry and so end the difficult situation she increasing finds herself in? Allen Stein speculates that perhaps it has to do with the ugly marriages that her friends are in. He says, "Further keeping Lily from rushing into the marriage that confers social power may well be an awareness of the obvious ugliness of the marriages of her friends" (234). This perhaps may have something to do with it. In fact it is quite probable that she cannot resolve herself to actually take what it is that her society and specifically her upbringing has taught her that she wants. Carol Weshoven says, "At the beginning of the novel, Lily’s inability to avail herself of a good marriage ‘deal’ is a combination of both flightiness and contempt for the prize she has been trained to work for" (44). It could be that underneath her flightiness and her superficial attraction with society, Lily truly desires to be independent of a man. Ultimately, she does not want a husband, although she desperately needs the money a wealthy husband, such as Gryce, can offer, because she is in love with the upper class society. Gilman addresses this saying, "There is still a pleasant ditty afloat as to the
'Three Old Maids Of Lynn,' who did not marry when they could, and could not marry when they would" (291). But it seems that to assume that she has simply waited too long is just any easy way out of the predicament of not being already married off to a financially stable family.

I believe that Judith Fryer comes closer to the heart of the matter when she claims that Lily's vulnerability has more to do with her upbringing and her lack of a sense of roots. She says:

Wharton renders Lily Bart vulnerable on two counts: she detaches her from any soil in which she might put down roots and she endows her with greater fastidiousness than 'the average section of womanhood.' The first deprives her of a sense of self and makes her like that 'water-plant in flux'; the second prevents her from becoming either a member of the 'frivolous society' or the working class, while it gives her increasingly lucid consciousness. (88)

The last part of this quotation is extremely important, because although Lily does become a failure according to the rules of her society, she does eventually achieve an understanding of herself. First, I would like to deal with the upbringing Lily had and how this ultimately affecting her moral understanding and secondly, I would then like to address how this affects the character of the woman we meet in this novel.

Wagner-Martin explains, "One of the tragedies of Lily's life, as Wharton has insisted throughout the novel, is that she had no home, no caring family, particularly no mother to guide and support her" (43). In a conversation with Gerty Farish, Lily was asked where she felt her desire for wealth came from. Gerty asked if she couldn't tell the
story from the beginning. "'From the beginning?' Miss Bart gently mimicked her.

"Dear Gerty, how little imagination you good people have! Why, the beginning was in my cradle, I suppose in the way I was brought up, and the things I was taught to care for" (176). Lily recognizes at this point, that she does not have much control over the values she has come to accept as her own. Even she has alluded to the fact that what she has learned and come to accept about life came from her mother.

Unfortunately, in the small but compelling glimpse that we have of Lily’s mother we view a picture of a woman who was obsessed with the idea of being rich. Her husband seemed of no account to her, other than the fact that his purpose was to provide her with the money she needed to spend. Lily describes her mother as “still young enough to dance her ball-dresses to rags” (25). It might be ascertained from this perspective that Lily’s mother was perhaps too young and to naïve herself to realize the importance of money. Instead her notions of money appeared to be extremely immature as can be seen in this example, where Lily’s mother thinks that one should never go without a good cook or a good dress. “Lily had been brought up in the faith that, whatever the cost, one must have a good cook, and be what Mrs. Bart called “decently dressed” (26). Also, Lily can’t seem to recall a time when there was ever enough money for whatever fancies her mother had at the time. “Lily could not recall the time when there had been enough money, and in some vague way her father seemed always to blame for the deficiency” (26).

Because of the fact that Lily was so dominated by her mother’s influence, she feels as though she never really got to know and understand her father, accept through the perspective that Mrs. Bart understood him. While Lily and her mother were off on some
jaunt or another, she would hear glimpses of the comments that Mrs. Bart would say concerning her husband, if he was commented on at all. None of these comments were positive, loving or caring. "Sometimes his daughter heard him denounced for having neglected to forward Mrs. Bart’s remittances; but for the most part he was never mentioned or thought of" (26). Lily never really knew who her father was and never came to realize that the reason that was was because he was too busy working in order to support her mother’s habits.

As Lily’s father lay on his deathbed, ruined, she tried to open some type of communication with him, but by this point it was simply too late.

She seemed always to have seen him through a blur – first a sleepiness, then a distance and indifference – and now the fog had thickened till he was almost undistinguishable. If she could have performed any little service for him, or have exchanged with him a few of those affecting words which an extensive perusal of fiction had led her to connect with such occasions, the filial instinct might have stirred in her; but her pity, finding no active expression, remained in a state of spectatorship, overshadowed by her mother’s grim unflagging resentment. (29)

Lily had no idea who her father was or what he had brought to the family, how he worked to support them, how he was responsible for the environment that she grew to understand as her own. The only perspective that Lily had was that of her mother, a selfish and immature wife. As her husband lay on his deathbed, ruined because he could not keep pace with his wife’s inexhaustible need for luxury, she treated him as if he were a stranger. "To his wife he no longer counted: he became extinct when he ceased to fulfill
his purpose, and she sat at his side with the provisional air of a traveller who waits for a belated train to start” (28). This was the beginning of Lily’s training. Not only did she learn early her sense of rootlessness, because her mother and she traveled often and had no one place that they recognized as home; but she also learned from her mother not to respect men. They were not people whom she should learn to try and love or at least respect. Instead, they were simply moneymaking machines whose usefulness was over the minute they could no longer perform their function. It is obvious that Lily has adopted this idea in the respect that she chooses to pursue Gryce who has a lot of money but can’t really offer companionship, instead of Selden who has none but can offer companionship.

Also, Lily quickly came to understand was that although money meant everything to her and her world and all that she knew, money meant little or nothing to her, because she had no respect for it, nor a proper understanding of how to make it work for her. If it was available then it was available to be spent on whatever fancy struck her at that moment. “All her life Lily had seen money go out as quickly as it came in, and whatever theories she cultivated as to the prudence of setting aside a part of her gains, she had unhappily no saving vision of the risks of the opposite course” (87). She had no idea of the importance of saving some money, making sure that there was enough for the things needed before spending it upon the things wanted. Unfortunately, this was a horrible habit that would end up causing Lily’s fall from society.

The next thing that Lily began to understand was the supposed power of her beauty. After her father had passed on Lily’s mother began to look to Lily as being their only saving grace. This is where the idea that a daughter should sacrifice her future for
the protection of the family unit came from. With no money left to live on and the fear of having to be dependent on family members who were more than likely not sympathetic to their cause, perhaps because the family saw their lives as wasteful and pointless, the only thing that could save them would be that Lily would have to marry rich. “Only one thought consoled her, and that was the contemplation of Lily’s beauty. She studied it with a kind of passion, as though it were some weapon she had slowly fashioned for her vengeance. It was the last asset in their fortunes, the nucleus around which their life was to be rebuilt” (29).

The result of her training was that she was a naïve girl who truly thought that her beauty would take her wherever she wished to go, and it was her mother who inculcated her with this belief. Wagner-Martin addresses her naivety saying, “Childlike, Lily follows a path of action based on her trust that people are helpful and kind. Because she has always been a beauty, Lily is accustomed to finding herself the center of both attention and envy. She is quick to accept the former, and much too ready to discount the latter. She accordingly leaves herself open to attack” (46). And Lily does find herself under attack as the story progresses. When her mother dies, Lily is left almost virtually abandoned. An aunt takes her in, not because she feels any sympathy for Lily, but because she knows that no one else will have her. Lily is therefore left on her own to with the disillusioned understanding she has about marriage, her complete lack of a concept of roots and completely misplaced set of morals. With all of these damaged tools she sets out to find herself a husband.

It becomes increasingly obvious to her as the years drag on and she remains single that she is completely unprepared for her task. She watches uglier and less intelligent
girls married off, because their mothers knew and understood how to place them in
wealthy homes. "The youngest, dumpiest, dullest of the four dumpy daughters whom
Mrs. Van Osburgh, with unsurpassed astuteness, had 'placed' one by one in enviable
niches of existence" (72). It is moments like these that Lily knows that she is not
knowledgeable enough about the intricate workings of marriage arrangements to help
herself. She is left only with a feeling of envy. "Wharton is clearly developing the theme
that Lily is an unprotected woman who has no sustenance from her remaining family, just
as she seems to have had none from her parents" (Wagner-Martin44). Lily is left alone in
her society with an incomplete understanding of its rules and regulations, and more
importantly, with an incomplete understanding of who she truly is. These dynamics
outline the progress that the book takes, as Lily slowly comes to learn about herself.
Carol Wershoven believes this path to be truly necessary to the understanding of Lily’s
growth. "And Lily, who begins as indeed a foolish, superficial heroine, must move,
through pain, humiliation, and rejection to a kind of bitter wisdom by the end of the
novel" (44).

In the first part of the novel Lily views herself as someone who requires luxury in
order to breathe and feel comfortable. "Her whole being dilated in an atmosphere of
luxury; it was the background she required, the only climate she could breathe in" (23).
She was quite superficial in this respect and probably because this was the only
environment that she had ever been in. As a result of this belief she harbored her
mother’s opinion that any class lower than that of the upper class was dingy and
repugnant and dinginess was the worst possible environment to be associated with. Her
idea of success, as she related to Selden was, "why, to get as much as one can out of life,
I suppose” (55). And this sense of accumulation revolved specifically around material appropriation.

Lily was the type of girl who felt that she was always the center of attention. This was so much a part of her nature that in the beginning of the story, this represented who she really was. Judith Fryer says of her, “She is ‘the real Lily Bart’ in that the real Lily Bart is one who is always engaged in ‘making up,’ whether she is decorating herself or posturing for a particular audience or studying herself in the mirror” (77). Sadly, this is the case- that Lily truly is a superficial and fickle girl, with no concept of morality. Her sense of morality comes and goes with the background of her environment. “Moral complications existed only in the environment that had produced them; she did not mean to slight or ignore them, but they lost their reality when they changed their background” (153). She could not help this behavior, I believe, because no aspect of her background taught her to see things in any other perspective. A result of this was expulsion from a society that began to view her as nothing more than an ornament that had lost its glow and therefore its ability to amuse.

As she moves through the novel and makes mistake after irreparable mistake, she at least begins to learn something about herself as a moral creature. For example, she comes to learn that she does have a sense of morality that she often times chooses to ignore. As Wharton states, “Her personal fastidiousness had a moral equivalent, and when she made a tour of inspection in her own mind there were certain doors she did not open” (Wershoven 66). She came, unfortunately too late, to realize that she choices that she made were her ruin. This is very similar to the situation of Charlotte Temple in the respect that neither of these women was endowed with a clear understanding of the rules
of their respective cultures, and as a result found themselves to be victims of their societies. Her responses initially were a compulsion for her environment and she found that an easy escape from having to face the reality of her situation was simply to leave. In a culture that moved about for much of the year, it was very easy to relocate for months on end in order to create a new setting.

Sadly, the truth of the situation was that she would have to face facts, which in her case was the fact that she owed a lot of money to a married man. Although he took advantage of her by not telling her that he was giving her the money and allowed her to believe that it was her own made through investments, it still left her degraded in the eyes of her critics. Lily, for her part, tried desperately to recover any lost ground, but it was to no avail. “Miss Bart had in fact been treading a devious way, and none of her critics could have been more alive to the fact than herself; but she had a fatalistic sense of being drawn from one wrong turning into another, without ever perceiving the right road till it was too late to take it” (101). And so she continued on this path, but it was too late.

Considering that Lily was just a representation of women at this time, it is difficult to speculate over how she should have acted if she were a real person. However, if an aspect of these novels was to teach young girls how or how not to live their lives, then this book shows that Lily should have realized that she had to either marry a man she did not care about or else abandon her love for society, perhaps trade it for a man's love, such as Selden. Either way, she should never have held so strongly onto her desperate decision, which only resulted in managing to ruin herself.

The only real sense of morality that she had ever really understood revolved around a maiden’s virtue. Namely, that a girl should remain a virgin until she was
married. As a result of her bad choices, rumors were being spread that she had become promiscuous with Trenor, the man from whom she had borrowed the money. Lily “was realizing for the first time that a woman’s dignity may cost more to keep up than her carriage; and that the maintenance of a moral attribute should be dependent on dollars and cents, made the world appear a more sordid place than she had conceived it” (135). Although she was beginning to understand that all the world was not as naïve ands innocent as she, her revelation has come to late.

Bertha Dorset, a woman who was jealous of Lily from the beginning has insinuated that Lily is having an affair with her husband. “The still virginal Lily, a member of the ‘protected’ class is ruined because her society assumes she has grown sexually experienced. Her value in the marriage mart has fallen to nothing” (Wagner-Martin 42). There is nothing more that Lily can do for sentence has been pronounced upon her, and she knows it. When asked to tell the truth and explain her side of the story, she can only say, “The whole truth?” Miss Bart laughed. ‘What is truth? Where a woman is concerned, it’s the story that’s easiest to believe. In this case it’s a great deal easier to believe Bertha Dorset’s story than mine, because she has a big house and an opera box, and it’s convenient to be on good terms with her” (176). Lily is ruined. She is believed to be a fallen woman, seduced by her inability to keep up with the financial burden of her surroundings and believed to have fallen back on her last and unspeakable trait, her ability to sexually attract another man and act on that.

I believe Lily was seduced by her environment, because of the way she had been raised and the ideals that she was taught. Her mother raised her to believe that she was part of upper-class society and even taught that sometimes beauty can carry a person
when money is not available to do the job. Also, she had no sense of home or a strong base, which can often be offered by a strong family unit, a place to go home to when the world became too overwhelming. "She herself had grown up without any one spot of earth being dearer to her than another; there was no centre of early pieties, of grave endearing traditions, to which her heart could revert and from which it could draw strength for itself and tenderness from others" (Stein 248). She may have come to finally gain some understanding about herself, but in the end it was too late. The only world that she had known and felt comfortable in had abandoned her. She had been raised to be an ornament and since she could never find anywhere to safely hang herself in order to be admired she was thrown out. It was not personal, but rather the rules of business in her environment and she could not live up to them. And, as in the case of most literature of this time, when she ceased to perform a useful role, she perished alone, deserted and degraded.
Each of these chapters explored the different ways that a girl, a virgin, may be seduced in the nineteenth century. Perhaps this proves that women truly needed to be protected during this time, however that is unlikely. Charlotte found herself seduced because she was not equipped with the knowledge necessary to make the correct choices, should she find herself in a situation where her family could not be of assistance. She did find herself in such a situation and because her parent’s felt it was more proper to leave their daughter ignorant as to the ways of the world, they ended up losing their daughter to that world.

Maggie is very similar to Charlotte in this respect. Although her culture was depicted as being very degraded, as opposed to Charlotte’s, she was expected to live up the same social standards. The author, Stephen Crane, felt it necessary to portray her as an already dim character who certainly had no chance of survival without the help of her family. Of course, it was the case that not only would that help not come, but also it would be her own family that would denounce her. Again we see a situation in which these girls needed to have life explained to them in a realistic fashion so that they would be capable of having at least some small sense that they world is not as nice and innocent as they are and therefore they should protect themselves from it.

The third chapter is a unique case, simply because Harriot Jacobs was a slave. She understood the rules of both the cultures she lived in. She had a full comprehension of the moral code that her family tried to adapt, as well as complete comprehension that this code was in direct conflict with the rules of slavery and ownership. However,
although on some level she did break her own moral code, she none-the-less can be regarded as a success story. The reason for this is that she retains her own free will. Charlotte and Maggie have no free will, because they are not fully informed and their poor decisions seem almost to be expected. In Jacobs' situation it is also felt that we expect her to be seduced by her own master, but this does not happen. Instead, she takes matters into her own hands and chooses a lover for herself, thereby breaking the pattern of seduction.

Lily is also a creature of no free will because she is not endowed with the knowledge of how to correctly and successfully exist within the confines of her culture. At the first opportunity to make the correct decision she chooses the wrong and therefore sets a chain of events into action from which she cannot escape. She was brought up with only a limited set of disillusioned beliefs which in no way were adequate enough to help to know how she should behave.

The intent of exploring each of these chapters is to realize that women could no longer be treated as ornaments and objects that needed to be protected, because the very system that was supposed to offer this solace was the same system that at every step attempted to take it away. These girls had no hope of surviving on their own and should not have been held responsible for their actions, or made to be an example to others girls as to how not to act. Unfortunately they were, but they are an example in another respect. The are examples of why families need to endow their children, both male and female, with knowledge of the true workings and intricacies of reality. They show that families must continue to protect and offer guidance so that their children will grow up being morally informed and responsible adults.
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