

Fatal Affections:

Charlotte Temple, The Coquette, and the Mourning Reader

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B.A. in Sociology

Syracuse University, 2022

A Thesis Presented to the Graduate Faculty
of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Department of English

University of Virginia

May 2024

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor Professor Emily Ogden for the invaluable knowledge, patience, and support provided throughout this entire process. Her encouragement and advice has helped me to become not only a better writer, but a more confident one. I would also like to thank Professor Anna Brickhouse for brainstorming with me at the very beginning stages of this project and allowing me to ramble on about *Charlotte Temple* during office hours.

I am deeply grateful for my parents who have provided their unconditional support and frequent words of encouragement and for my brother who reminds me not to take everything so seriously. I am thankful for all of my friends—at UVa and beyond—for the inspiration and enthusiasm which encouraged me to keep writing, despite the moments of doubt. Finally, I would like to thank Lauren who no longer lives a few dorm rooms down from me, but has always been by my side despite the distance.

I. Introduction

O friend! O Sister! to thy bosom dear,
By every tie that binds the soul sincere.
O while I fondly dwell upon thy name,
Why sinks my soul unequal to the theme?

– Elizabeth Whitman, “To Mr. Barlow”¹

Tears and the varieties of mourning, melancholia, satire, and bargaining that respond to disappointment are gestures that define living as responsiveness to the urgencies of the ongoing moment, as a scene of heroism and pragmatism authorized by fantasy.

– Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint*²

“Among the Danvers romances there is one of especial pathos, and one of still unsolved mystery,” wrote a journalist for the *San Francisco Bulletin* in 1875.³ This “still unsolved mystery” was that of the death of a young woman named Elizabeth Whitman. As the story goes, Whitman arrived at the Bell Tavern in Danvers, Massachusetts in 1788 alone, pregnant, and “somewhat worn.”⁴ Whitman insisted that her name was Mrs. Walker, and that she was married and awaiting her husband’s arrival. She waited at the tavern for several weeks “at the window of the South chamber,” passing the “heavy hours at her needle or guitar,” and rousing curiosity for the “village gossips” as the “‘strange lady’ at the Bell Tavern.”⁵ Eventually she gave birth, though the child was still born. Whitman’s own death followed only a few weeks later in July of 1788, likely due to complications from the childbirth. She was buried outside of the Bell Tavern, and her grave was visited “by almost the whole population of the village, as well as by many

¹ This fragment was printed following Whitman’s death in several newspapers—Whitman was, in her day, never a published poet. Bryan Waterman, “Coquetry and Correspondence In Revolutionary-Era Connecticut: Reading Elizabeth Whitman’s Letters,” *Early American Literature* 46, no. 3 (January 2011): 541-63.

² Lauren Berlant, *The Female Complaint: The Unfinished Business of Sentimentality In American Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 12.

³ “An Unsolved Mystery—a Romance of the Last Century,” *San Francisco Bulletin*, San Francisco, California, April 15, 1875.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ “Selections. the Old Bell Tavern-Danvers, Mas,” *Portsmouth Journal of Literature and Politics*, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, April 18, 1840.

from the neighboring towns,” yet no one could have predicted just how many more visitors she would receive in the century to come.⁶ The final line of the inscription upon Whitman’s headstone might be read as prophetic: “The tears of strangers watered her grave.”⁷

Nine years after her death, Whitman’s grave would be the subject of national fame and the tears that “watered her grave” would be those of strangers from all over the country who made the pilgrimage to the Bell Tavern to mourn Whitman, or Eliza Wharton as they knew her. In 1797, an author from Salisbury, Massachusetts named Hannah Webster Foster spun Whitman’s tragic tale into a sensational epistolary novel titled *The Coquette*. Once the novel became a best-seller, Elizabeth Whitman, or rather Eliza Wharton (Whitman’s fictional counterpart), became a celebrity. The mysterious girl at the Bell Tavern was now known as the girl who had been seduced and abandoned by her lover, left to die among strangers following the birth of her illegitimate child. For nearly a century, readers collectively mourned at Whitman’s grave and “plighted their troth amid the whisperings of the unmown grass.”⁸ So many mourners chipped off pieces of Whitman’s headstone for keepsake that serious concerns arose around the preservation of the stone.⁹ There were traveling wax shows that displayed the figure of Wharton holding her baby, a museum that claimed to own the harpsichord that she played at the tavern, and personalized copies of *The Coquette* made by fans who cut and pasted newspaper articles about Whitman/Wharton into their editions.¹⁰

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ "An Unsolved Mystery—a Romance of the Last Century;" A quick note on naming: Following the publication of *The Coquette*, the names Eliza Wharton and Elizabeth Whitman became synonymous with one another. The story of Eliza Wharton, as far as the public was concerned, was the story of Elizabeth Whitman. If, later in this analysis, I refer to this grave as belonging to Eliza Wharton, it is only because journals from the nineteenth century do so. As far as I can tell, there was no additional headstone erected for Eliza Wharton. Eliza Wharton’s grave is Elizabeth Whitman’s grave.

⁹ "From the Boston Cultivator. The Town of Danvers," *Haverhill Gazette*, Haverhill, Massachusetts, January 23, 1841.

¹⁰ Jennifer Harris, “‘Almost Idolatrous Love’: Caroline Dall, Sarah Knowles Bolton, Mary C. Crawford and the Case of Elizabeth Whitman,” in *Women Writers and the Artifacts of Celebrity In the Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. Ann R. Hawkins and Maura C. Ives, (London: Routledge, 2016), 120-21.

Six years before *The Coquette*, another “credulous girl” named Charlotte Temple became subject to a similar celebrity status. Susanna Rowson’s *Charlotte Temple*, frequently cited as the first American best-selling novel, similarly narrates a tale of seduction: Charlotte Temple is seduced, carries an illicit pregnancy, is abandoned by her lover, and left to give birth and die in a new and unfamiliar location. Unlike Foster’s tale, *Charlotte Temple* is not necessarily “Founded in Fact.” Though Rowson wrote in the preface to the novel, “the circumstances on which I have founded this novel were related some little time since by an old lady who had personally known Charlotte,” there is no evidence to suggest that Charlotte Temple actually existed.¹¹ Similar to Eliza Wharton, Charlotte Temple inspired throngs of mourners to make a pilgrimage to her grave, lay flowers and weep for “the poor girl who died for love.”¹² However, it is likely that the “plain brownstone slab” that marked Charlotte’s grave previously marked the burial site of another.¹³ It is probable that the “former inscription [on her headstone] was effaced and cut out,” and in its place, Charlotte’s name was marked in “plain - almost awkward” letters.¹⁴ Despite Charlotte’s uncertain existence, for nearly a century after the publication of the novel, her grave in Trinity Churchyard was “visited by more tourists than any other sepulchre, with the single exception of general Grant’s.”¹⁵

Literary tourism was not unique to readers of the seduction novel, in fact in the nineteenth-century it had become a phenomenon. As Alison Booth writes in *Homes and Haunts*, it was becoming increasingly popular for readers to seek out the homes that the authors once lived in, the countryside where they were raised, or the real life landmarks depicted in their

¹¹ Susanna Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*, ed. Cathy N. Davidson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 5.

¹² “Charlotte Temple’s Grave,” *The Madison daily leader*; Madison, South Dakota, February 1, 1895.

¹³ “MYSTERY OF A TOMS.: CHARLOTTE TEMPLE’S GRAVE IN TRINITY CHURCHYARD, NEW YORK,” *The Washington Post*, Washington, D.C., May 9, 1897.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁵ “Latest News Items,” *San Francisco Bulletin*, San Francisco, California, October 13, 1887.

favorite novels.¹⁶ Moreover, as David Haven Blake illustrates, authors were becoming celebrities. Poets in particular, deployed an intimate tone in their writing which made readers feel as though they *knew* the author. Homes and hotels were crowded and broken into in an attempt to gain one moment alone with that author whom they felt to be a friend, or a lover.¹⁷

An early American reader would have been prone to this kind of one-sided intimacy. As Elizabeth Barnes notes in *States of Sympathy*, the early American reader was a sympathetic reader—that is, putting oneself in relation to “other imagined selves.”¹⁸ The seduction novel deliberately attempts to forge these affective bonds, often addressing the reader directly—instructing one on how to properly sympathize with the character. Susanna Rowson’s interjecting authorial voice frequently performs this task in *Charlotte Temple*: “Then once more read over the sorrows of poor Mrs. Temple, and remember, the mother whom you so dearly love and venerate will feel the same.”¹⁹

Critics such as Cathy Davidson, Marion Rust, and Elizabeth Dill have helpfully illuminated the seduction novel as being a product of the popular conflation of the female body and the nation, which placed upon early American women the task of upholding the morality and futurity of the nation. Davidson and Rust have argued that by representing the unjustness of the punishment of the fallen woman, authors of the seduction novel problematize early national conceptions of female sexual deviance. My aim in this thesis is not only to contribute to, but to expand these discourses through an analysis of the parallels between the mass, collective mourning that broke out for Charlotte and Eliza and contemporary instances of mass mourning

¹⁶ Alison Booth, *Homes and Haunts: Touring Writers' Shrines and Countries* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2016), 1.

¹⁷ David Haven Blake, "When Readers Become Fans: Nineteenth-Century American Poetry As a Fan Activity," *American Studies* 52, no. 1, (January 2012): 104-105.

¹⁸ Elizabeth Barnes, *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy In the American Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 5.

¹⁹ Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*, 54.

which break out amongst fans following the sudden or premature death of a celebrity. The mass mourning of Charlotte and Eliza which persisted throughout the nineteenth-century has often been a footnote in the history of the seduction novel in the early republic rather than a subject of inquiry. This phenomenon is, in fact, often written off as being a product of the massive popularity of the novels, and thus, merely a part of a history of literary tourism which gripped nineteenth-century readers. Though it certainly *was* a part of this history, it was also much more than that. In this thesis, I consider the mass mourning of Charlotte and Eliza not only within this history of literary tourism and celebrity, but also in its striking similarities to contemporary celebrity. In mapping these concurrences between early American and contemporary celebrity, I want to draw a particular emphasis towards the act of mourning the celebrity. How does a socially and politically maligned woman become mournable? What inspires one to mourn for a celebrity whom they never knew, but imaginatively? What kinds of social and political grievances are implicit in the act of mourning?

I anchor my readings of these affective bonds in Lauren Berlant's concept of the intimate public: an affective sphere, often formed around literature marketed towards women, in which individuals sense that the text expresses those feelings and emotions that are common among them. I see *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* as engendering the formation of these intimate publics, and the act of mourning as participating within the juxtopolitical sphere: a space in which individuals facilitate a fantasy where one can "harness the power of emotion to change what is structural in the world."²⁰ Moreover, I see the juxtopolitical sphere as being the primary bridge between early American and contemporary displays of mass mourning for celebrities. What I hope to demonstrate in this analysis is that while the advent of mass media and mass consumerism has changed the way that fans consume the products of celebrity, the affective

²⁰ Berlant, *The Female Complaint*, 12.

bonds that fans forge with celebrities, and specifically, for the purposes of this thesis, emotional responses to celebrity death, have remained the same. My analysis will be particularly focused on what I will term the “gone too soon” celebrity deaths—that is, celebrity deaths that are deemed sudden and premature. I am interested in the “gone too soon” not only as far as it is applicable to Charlotte and Eliza’s deaths, but because these kinds of celebrity deaths tend to elicit a particularly heightened emotional response from fans. Moreover, the grief elicited from fans on the occasion of such a death is often a response not only to the death itself, but the larger circumstances which engendered that death. When Diana, Princess of Wales passed away suddenly in a car crash, fans gathered to perform mass mournings during which both the loss of Diana was grieved and her ill treatment by the royal family was criticized. Her post-mortem image was like that of a martyr—similar to Charlotte and Eliza. Religious language and imagery is often imbued in the language of celebrity, and cries of martyrdom after a premature celebrity death frequently imply a feeling amongst fans that the death was unjust. Mourning, thus, if it resides within the juxtapolitical sphere, provides space—where it feels as though the harnessing of emotions is powerful enough to change social and political structures—for fans to decry this unjustness.

II. “To the many daughters of Misfortune”: Readership and Identification in the early republic

By the winter of 1811, James Bishop’s traveling wax show had arrived in Portland, Maine and was advertising a brand new edition to their collection:

James Bishop respectfully informs the Ladies and Gentlemen of Portland and its vicinity, that he has received in addition to his museum a correct likeness of the American Coquette, ELIZA WHARTON, which he presumes will give general satisfaction.²¹

Eliza Wharton was not the only fallen woman depicted in wax work. An attendee of one of these shows could see the likenesses of Eliza Wharton and Charlotte Temple (each likely carrying their illegitimate child) among the likenesses of other great American figures such as George Washington and James Monroe.²² Those figures represented as waxwork were chosen for their cultural influence and historical significance, and though it might seem absurd to us now, Charlotte Temple and Eliza Wharton *did* embody these traits. By the early nineteenth century, even those who had not read *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette*, would likely know the names of the fallen heroines. Knowledge of popular texts and characters including *The Coquette* and *Charlotte Temple* permeated the American public consciousness through what Jordan Stein refers to as “text-networks.”²³ Popular novels spawned “authorized and unauthorized reprintings, multiple adaptations, multiple authors, editors, and translators.”²⁴ *The Coquette*, for instance, inspired a three act play adaptation, titled *The New-England Coquette, or History of Eliza Wharton* and works of what would contemporarily be referred to as fan-fiction such as J. Tomlin’s *A Sketch From Life*.²⁵ Most importantly, Rowson and Foster’s narratives had inspired a

²¹ "Advertisement," *Gazette*, Portland, Maine, December 30, 1811.

²² "Advertisement," *Alexandria Gazette*, Alexandria, Virginia, December 24, 1818.

²³ Jordan Alexander Stein, *When Novels Were Books* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2020), 93.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 95-96.

²⁵ "Advertisement," *Salem Register*, Salem, Massachusetts, June 17, 1802; Works of fan-fiction, as Lucy Irene Baker describes them, are “[a]daptations of existing works,” created by a fan of that existing work. Lucy Irene Baker, *Media and Gender Adaptation: Regendering, Critical Creation and the Fans* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023); Tomlin imagines himself as a friend of Eliza Wharton who was present the moment she met Major Sanford which is, in this story, during Eliza’s eighteenth birthday party. “BY, J. TOMLIN. 1841. A SKETCH FROM LIFE,” *Graham's Lady's and Gentleman's Magazine*, March 1841.

desire for literary tourism. The frequent visitations to Charlotte and Eliza's graves were being covered often, and with considerably dramatized accounts:

A few days ago passerby in Broadway, looking through the high fence that surrounds Trinity churchyard, saw a slender black gowned girl kneeling by the grave of Charlotte Temple. Her head was bowed in her hands, and she seemed utterly lost in her surroundings. After awhile she arose with a very pale face, walked swiftly through the gates and disappeared in the crowd. She was only one of the many devotees at the shrine of the poor girl who died for love.²⁶

By the late eighteenth century, the novel was still finding its footing. The general "acceptance of verisimilitude as a form of truth" meant that authors had to "recognize and justify their fictions," assuring readers that their narratives were "Founded in Fact" or "A Tale of Truth."²⁷ To the American public, Charlotte and Eliza *were* real people, and they garnered so much attention due, in part, to the mystique that surrounded their lives. Readers generated widespread interest in the novels by speculating the true identity of Charlotte as well as the configuration of Eliza Wharton's family history. Genealogy studies, such as Caroline Wells Healey Dall's *The "Romance of the Association" for the Last Time* for example, claimed that the character of Charlotte Temple was based on a woman named Charlotte Stanley whose family had ties to British royalty, and that if one were to accurately trace the family histories of Charlotte Stanley and Elizabeth Whitman, one would find that the two were distant cousins²⁸.

As Sharon Marcus writes in *The Drama of Celebrity*, fans do not gain intimacy with celebrities through interactions with the celebrity themselves, but with "the heaps of stuff

²⁶ "Charlotte Temple's Grave."

²⁷ Catherine Gallagher, "The Rise of Fictionality," in *The Novel*, ed. Franco Moretti (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 341; Stein, *When Novels Were Books*, 151.

²⁸ Caroline Wells Healey Dall, *The "Romance of the Association" for the Last Time* (Cambridge Mass: Roberts Brothers, 1875); "An Unsolved Mystery—a Romance of the Last Century."

generated by celebrity culture.”²⁹ Devoted readers utilized the material productions of Charlotte and Eliza’s narratives to gain intimacy with these women: visiting their headstones, viewing their wax work figures, going to a museum that claimed to own one of Eliza’s possessions, and personalizing their copies of the novels.

Throughout the nineteenth century, readers were developing a stronger fascination with the “originating milieu” of their beloved texts.³⁰ They were visiting the homes in which these texts were written, the countryside where the author was raised, the real-life landmarks depicted in the text, and more. In doing so, readers were becoming *fans*. As David Haven Blake notes, the development of readers’ desire to gain intimacy with their favorite writers, changed the way that poets, such as Walt Whitman, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Lydia H. Sigourney, interacted with their readership. Fans felt such intensely intimate connections with these poets, that they went as far as trying to break into their homes and hotel rooms just to have a moment with them.³¹ As Blake succinctly puts it, “fans claimed the right to be recognized, to turn the illusory intimacy at the heart of celebrity culture into a substantially personal bond.”³² Just as the poetry of Whitman, Longfellow, and Sigourney encouraged an intimacy between the reader and text, so too did the seduction novel. In the “dear reader” moments of the text, Susanna Rowson makes direct appeals to the readers’ sympathies, asking them to feel everything that the characters are feeling—a tactic that was part and parcel of the sentimental novel. The manufacturing of this kind of one-sided intimacy—an affect that is still alive and well in contemporary celebrity-fan relations—makes the reader feel that they *know* the celebrity, or, in this case, the character.³³

²⁹ Sharon Marcus, *The Drama of Celebrity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 96.

³⁰ Booth, *Homes and Haunts*, 1.

³¹ Blake, “When Readers Become Fans,” 104-105.

³² Blake, “When Readers Become Fans,” 105.

³³ In contemporary celebrity studies, this kind of one-sided intimacy is referred to as a “para-social” relationship. The term “para-social” was coined in 1956 by Donald Horton and R. Richard Wohl, and, to quote Ellis Cashmore, defines “a form of interaction between human beings that lay outside the range of conventional face-to-face communication.” Ellis Cashmore, *Celebrity Culture* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2024), 70.

What is particularly striking about *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* is precisely this—readers did not develop fandoms around the authors but the characters themselves. Though some fans may have pasted a clipping of Rowson’s obituary in their copies of *Charlotte Temple*, they were not gathering to mourn at her grave—or at least they were not doing it enough to be reported in the newspaper.³⁴ So, what was it about Charlotte and Eliza that engendered such passionate identification? Let us go back to outlining the conditions of the novel and readership in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The verisimilitude of late eighteenth century novels coupled with their cultural pervasiveness, encouraged an “upswing in reading for identification—the process by which readers relate their experiences of the world with those characters, and vice versa.”³⁵ *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* were published in 1791 and 1797 respectively, shortly following the end of the American Revolution in the 1780s. The significant rate of mortality during the Revolution—which was immediately followed by a baby boom—changed the landscape of American readership.³⁶ As “a full two-thirds of the white population of America was under the age of twenty-four” by the early nineteenth century, Charlotte and Eliza would have reflected the youth of the population.³⁷ Moreover, these novels were read widely thanks to circulating libraries and the rise in literacy rates. An 1827 advertisement from *The Virginian* claimed that *Charlotte Temple* was “more widely circulated at home and abroad among the *lower classes* than any other work of American fiction.”³⁸ What is striking about *Charlotte Temple*’s popularity amongst “the lower classes” is that these readers would have been considered the most vulnerable to real life

³⁴ Susanna Rowson, *Charlotte Temple* (New York: Samuel A. Burtus, 1814), Copy 1, Clifton Waller Barrett Library of American Literature, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

³⁵ Stein, *When Novels Were Books*, 9.

³⁶ Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel In America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 188.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 188.

³⁸ “Charlotte Temple,” *The Virginian*, Lynchburg, Virginia, November 12, 1827: 143 (my italics).

“seduction”. As I will expand on later in this analysis, nineteenth century biopolitics weaponized medical discourse around vaginal health and reproduction to differentiate classes and races based on a biological difference. As Kyla Schuller explains in *The Biopolitics of Feeling*, lower class white women—whose vaginas were labeled with the ability to be affected, unlike those of black women—were thought to be most at risk of having “too frequent sexual impressions” and transforming into a “desiccated relic.”³⁹ The majority white, female, and middle to lower class readers of the seduction novel would have been acutely aware of the dangers of having “too frequent sexual impressions” both for their personal social status as well as for the futurity of the nation. Many of these readers may have looked to the seduction novel as a pedagogical tool—desiring to learn from the mistakes of Charlotte and Eliza.

Through their reflection of fears among early American women concerning sexual ruin, these novels engender the formation of an intimate public. As Berlant explains, “participants in the intimate public *feel* as though [the text] expresses what is common among them, a subjective likeness that seems to emanate from their history and their ongoing attachments and actions.”⁴⁰ The “young and thoughtless of the fair sex,” to whom Rowson addresses her preface, could form attachments to one another through the novels’ expressions of the emotional commonalities among them.⁴¹ Moreover, these affective worlds engender a sense of belonging among those who identify with the emotionality expressed by the text. The juxtopolitical sphere is a safer and less fraught environment than the political sphere. Those mourning the deaths of Charlotte and Eliza

³⁹ Though I am specifically writing about lower class white women as they represented a significant portion of the reader demographic of the seduction novel, it is important to underscore that the greatest violence of nineteenth century biopolitics was inflicted on black women. Even the poorest white woman still had the privilege of possessing a vagina that *could* be affected. Black women were differentiated from the “civilizing race” with the claim that their vaginas could not be impressed upon at all. This idea resulted in horrific unauthorized, unsanitized, and unanesthetized surgeries on black women. Kyla Schuller, *The Biopolitics of Feeling: Race, Sex, and Science In the Nineteenth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 108; *Ibid.*, 111.

⁴⁰ Berlant, *The Female Complaint*, 5.

⁴¹ Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*, 5.

could feel satisfaction in expressing frustration towards the social and political structures that enable the social death of the fallen woman without directly challenging those structures.

III. “Beware Eliza!”: A Politics of Virtue and Violence

“What a pity it is, that so fair a form, so accomplished a mind, should be tarnished, in the smallest degree, by the follies of coquetry!”⁴² These are the words of J. Boyer, Eliza Wharton’s rejected suitor upon learning of Wharton and Peter Sanford’s secret rendezvous. Eliza Wharton, a young girl previously engaged to a Mr. Haly, but recently mourning the death of her fiance, has returned to the marriage market and is considerably sought out by two suitors: J. Boyer, a respected and financially secure clergyman; and Peter Sanford, a known rake who desires marriage only for its ability to raise him from his poor financial status. The novel is composed of letters primarily written by Eliza, her friends Lucy Sumner (née Freeman) and Julia Granby, as well as J. Boyer and Peter Sanford. Boyer and Sanford write to their confidants, allowing the reader to unpack the true nature of their affections for Eliza. One learns, for instance, of Sanford’s desire only to seduce Eliza and never marry her, as she could not improve his financial standing. He speaks of Eliza as a prize to be won rather than with genuine affection: “If I should [seduce her], she can blame none but herself, since she knows my character, and has no reason to wonder if I act consistently with it.”⁴³ Conversely one finds in Boyer’s letters a desire for Eliza’s time which is untainted by ulterior motives: “I find the graces of her person and mind rise in my esteem; and have already enjoyed, in her society, some of the happiest hours of my life.”⁴⁴ Eliza eventually loses the interest of Boyer as a result of Sanford’s frequent and persistent advances:

⁴² Hannah Webster Foster, *The Coquette*, in “*The Power of Sympathy*” and “*The Coquette*,” ed. Carla Mulford (New York: Penguin, 1996), 163.

⁴³ Foster, *The Coquette*, 149.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 130.

“Major Sanford assiduously precluded the possibility of my being much engaged by anyone else.”⁴⁵ Sanford’s constant visitations and insistence on being alone with Eliza predictably result in her illicit pregnancy. “Yes! It was Major Sanford,” Eliza says to Lucy Sumner, “the man who has robbed me of my peace; who has triumphed in my destruction.”⁴⁶ Ashamed and distraught, Eliza leaves home in the middle of the night, leaving a letter for her mother informing her of her pregnancy, and thus her ruin: “Farewell, my dear mamma! pity and pray for your ruined child.”⁴⁷ Immediately following this letter, Eliza’s family and friends receive word of her death—induced by childbirth—and the final letter of the novel, from Julia Granby to Eliza’s mother, contains an image of Eliza’s headstone, the inscription identical to that on Elizabeth Whitman’s headstone in Danvers, Massachusetts.

Rowson’s novel follows a similar formula. Charlotte Temple is a young English schoolgirl of fifteen who catches the eye of the older Lieutenant Montraville, who with the help of the morally tainted Mademoiselle La Rue, is able to pass Charlotte a letter inviting her to a meeting. Charlotte is at first resistant to opening the letter, but La Rue persuades her: “[F]or my part I could no more let a letter addressed to me lie unopened so long, than I could work miracles.”⁴⁸ Unlike Foster’s novel, *Charlotte Temple* is not written in epistolary format, and Rowson frequently interjects her authorial voice, often to fortify her pedagogical aim: “Oh my dear girls—for to such only am I writing—listen not to the voice of love, unless sanctioned by paternal approbation.”⁴⁹ Charlotte of course does not heed the advice of her author and meets several more times with Montraville who makes attempts in persuading her to elope with him to America. An indecisive Charlotte has her choice made for her when Montraville, now

⁴⁵ Ibid., 145.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 220.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 230.

⁴⁸ Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*, 31.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 29.

considerably agitated, forces her into a chaise and drives away. Upon receiving word of their daughter's departure, Mr. and Mrs. Temple are heartbroken. Charlotte, now in New York, is similarly downtrodden, "wearing out her heavy hours in deep regret and anguish of heart."⁵⁰ She finds a friend in her neighbor, the "benevolent Mrs. Beauchamp," but the amicable presence of Mrs. Beauchamp is not a strong enough salve for Charlotte's misery, and she ultimately meets the same fate as Eliza.⁵¹ Her pregnancy brings on a grave illness that had "so altered her features that Mrs. Beauchamp had not the least recollection of her person."⁵² After a succession of gothic scenes of Charlotte undergoing an agonizing physical transformation as a result of her ill health, she gives birth to her daughter. The misery of her illness drives her to madness, so much so that she does not recognize her own child: "[S]he was not conscious of being a mother, nor took the least notice of her child except to ask whose it was, and why it was not carried by its parents."⁵³

"Let sincerity and virtue be your guides," Mrs. Richman says to Eliza, "and they will lead you to happiness and peace."⁵⁴ Sincerity and virtue are pillars of the philosophies of John Locke, who Charlotte and Eliza certainly would have looked to for moral guidance. In *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke writes, "[i]t is the *understanding* that sets man above the rest of sensible beings, and gives him all the advantage and dominion which he has over them."⁵⁵ This sentiment permeates Locke's philosophies and informed what Jennifer Fleissner calls "the eighteenth-century 'culture of sentiment'."⁵⁶ This "culture of sentiment" espoused the Lockean idea that the human being is "innately equipped to seek the good...through a built-in

⁵⁰ Ibid., 65.

⁵¹ Ibid., 95.

⁵² Ibid., 112.

⁵³ Ibid., 111.

⁵⁴ Foster, *The Coquette*, 134.

⁵⁵ John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding: In Four Books* (London: Edw. Mory, 1690), 1.

⁵⁶ Jennifer Fleissner, *Maladies of the Will: The American Novel and the Modernity Problem* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2022), 69.

‘moral sense’.”⁵⁷ Through the understanding of one’s heart, one can act in accordance with its “moral sense.” As Fleissner writes in *Maladies of the Will*, Locke was “engaged in a project of *managing* the Pandora’s box of selfhood opened by seventeenth-century introspection.”⁵⁸ If the modern senses were naturally good and moral, the self would be “less in conflict both internally and in relation to the external world.”⁵⁹ The pervasiveness of Locke’s philosophies within early American consciousness cannot be overstated. His essay cloaked him with the image of a “guide, model, and moral exemplar,” and his philosophies were “an immediate and pervasive presence in people’s daily lives,” teaching them, “how to rear children, study scripture, and pursue a variety of other activities related to improving both themselves and their communities”⁶⁰. Early Americans absorbed Locke’s philosophies through his writings and the British sentimental novels that amplified them. Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*, for example, which endorsed “Locke’s approach to pedagogy and childrearing,” was popular among early American readers.⁶¹ The permeation of Locke’s ideas concerning morality, pedagogy, and self-management undergirds the emergence of the American seduction novel in the late eighteenth-century.

In a letter to Lucy Freeman where Eliza recounts a meeting with Mr. Boyer, she tacitly admits to her lack of Lockean philosophical understanding: “Self-knowledge, sir, that most important of all sciences, I have yet to learn. Such have been my situations in life, and the natural volatility of my temper, that I have looked but little into my own heart, in regard to its future wishes and views.”⁶² Learning how to read oneself (a skill which Wharton lacks) was part of the pedagogical aim of the seduction novel. Rowson and Foster wrote with the knowledge that their

⁵⁷ Ibid., 69.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 69.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 67.

⁶⁰ Claire Rydell Arcenas, *America’s Philosopher: John Locke In American Intellectual Life* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2022), 9.

⁶¹ Ibid., 10.

⁶² Foster, *The Coquette*, 126.

female readers would empathize with Charlotte and Eliza and (hopefully) learn from their mistakes. If young female readers witnessed the tragedy that could befall a girl lacking in the Lockean art of self-knowledge, it might inspire them to look into their own heart and more aptly circumscribe their behavior in accordance to the accepted social boundaries of morality. As Emily Ogden notes in *Credulity*, Foster challenged readers to surveil the imagination of Eliza Wharton, “as a proxy for surveilling their own imaginations. The novel primes its readers for seeing an equivalence between self-monitoring and monitoring others”⁶³. This sentiment is not dissimilar to that espoused by Adam Smith in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*: “The principle by which we naturally either approve or disapprove of our own conduct, seems to be altogether the same with that by which we exercise the like judgements concerning the conduct of other people”⁶⁴. In other words, by surveilling others, we can more duly surveil ourselves.

With a lack of self-knowledge, one not only puts into jeopardy their own virtue, but also that of their family. When Charlotte and Eliza flee from their homes, the readers’ attention is brought back to their parents and the heartache of losing their children—both literally and metaphorically. As Rowson writes to her audience:

Then once more read over the sorrows of poor Mrs. Temple, and remember, the mother whom you so dearly love and venerate will feel the same, when you, forgetful of the respect due to your maker and yourself, forsake the paths of virtue for those of vice and folly.⁶⁵

Upon learning of Eliza’s departure, Mrs. Wharton draws similar sympathies from the reader when she exclaims: “Oh, my child, my child! dear, very dear hast thou been to my fond heart!

⁶³ Emily Ogden, *Credulity: A Cultural History of US Mesmerism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), 58.

⁶⁴ Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 128.

⁶⁵ Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*, 54.

Little did I think it possible for you to prepare so dreadful a cup of sorrow for your widowed mother!” Charlotte and Eliza being the only children in their families meant that they would not only have been symbolically expected to ensure the futurity of the nation, they would have literally been expected to ensure the futurity of their families. In fact, many editions of *Charlotte Temple* produced in the nineteenth century include this quote from *Romeo and Juliet* on the title page: “She was her parent’s only joy: / They had but one – one darling child.”⁶⁶ Reproduction and maintenance of the family structure was of utmost socio-political importance in the early republic. As Kyla Schuller illustrates, “the vagina was properly the executor of sexuality, regulating national destiny.”⁶⁷ Extramarital or too frequent “sexual impressions,” especially among the poor, were thought to risk the futurity of the nation, and more specifically the futurity of the race. Given that the poor “possessed an inferior capacity of self-regulation and self-knowledge,” they were denied contraceptive devices and prostitutes were considered to have vaginal tissue so over-stimulated that their vagina was considered a “desiccated relic.”⁶⁸ In the early nation, the white female body was conflated with the national body. The ruin of one, signified the ruin of the other. Throughout the nineteenth-century, the white female body continued to be the apparatus through which the “civilized” nation would be maintained as scientists saw white women as the proprietors of racial integrity. Too frequent sexual impressions would literally bring one down a social class. Eliza Wharton’s sexual impressions, for instance, bring her from her comfortable residence at home to a tavern filled with strangers. Sexual impressions outside of the confines of marriage certainly resulted in social, and in some cases, physical death.

⁶⁶ Susanna Rowson, *Charlotte Temple* (New York: J. Desnoues, Printer, 1814), Copy 2, Clifton Waller Barrett Library of American Literature, Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia.

⁶⁷ Schuller, *The Biopolitics of Feeling*, 115.

⁶⁸ Schuller, *The Biopolitics of Feeling*, 111.

Moreover, we must consider the pervasiveness of rape as an important facet of the sexual politics of the early nation. As a weapon of war, reported instances of rape rose drastically during the revolution.⁶⁹ Rape was understood not as an act of violence, but as one giving into one's passions. Women's claims of sexual violence were frequently dismissed as they were assumed to be "self-serving deflections of responsibility for sexual misbehavior."⁷⁰ One need only turn to Peter Sanford's sentiments regarding Eliza Wharton's ruin: "She can blame none but herself, since she knows my character."⁷¹ *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* were reflecting this common refiguring of force and sexual violence as seduction. As Elizabeth Dill underscores in *Erotic Citizens*, these novels might be more aptly described as rape-ruin narratives. Dill rightly points out that the scene of consummation in *Charlotte Temple*, is an omitted rape scene:

"Alas! my torn heart!" said Charlotte, "how shall I act?"

"Let me direct you," said Montraville, lifting her into the chaise.

"Oh! my dear forsaken parents!" cried Charlotte.

The chaise drove off. She shrieked, and fainted into the arms of her betrayer.⁷²

Following in the footsteps of *Clarissa*, Charlotte Temple is kidnapped and raped following her repeated refusal of Montraville's advances:

"I cannot go," she said: "cease, dear Montraville, to persuade. I must not:

religion, duty, forbid."⁷³

What this scene illustrates is that one can steadfastly hold on to the moral and religious ideals of the nation and still be subject to sexual ruin. The woman who willingly gives into her sexual

⁶⁹ Sharon Block, *Rape and Sexual Power In Early America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 81-82.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁷¹ Foster, *The Coquette*, 149.

⁷² Elizabeth Dill, *Erotic Citizens: Sex and the Embodied Subject In the Antebellum Novel* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2019), 158; Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*, 47-48.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 47.

desires, and the exemplar of Lockean morality who is raped are both nominally understood as fallen women. Rowson, knowingly or unknowingly, resists the notion that one could avoid one's ruin by dedicating oneself to the accepted moral and religious doctrine of the period. By illuminating the arbitrary nature of Charlotte's punishment, Rowson also illuminates the arbitrary nature of the social death of the real life fallen woman. Given the pervasiveness of sexual shame and rape throughout this period, the shame and stigmatization embodied by Charlotte Temple and Eliza Wharton as a result of illicit sexual relations would have been felt or at the least understood by their female readers. Though it may seem a detour from discussions of celebrity, what I mean to illustrate in this section is that the mourning which broke out for Charlotte and Eliza was larger than simply a lament of their deaths. As Ellis Cashmore notes in *Celebrity Culture*, fans do not simply observe their favorite celebrities, they *identify* with them.⁷⁴ We might see something in that celebrity that reminds us of ourselves, our friends, or our family. This is only emphasized by the access we have to the details of their life and personality—the good and the bad. The extent to which contemporary fans can access the personal lives of celebrities has certainly changed with the advent of mass media, yet the impulse for identification is the same. Just as contemporary fans might gain insight into the private lives of their favorite celebrities by surveilling them through social media, fans of Charlotte and Eliza surveilled their actions and imaginations through their respective novels. Whether or not readers were supposed to learn from their mistakes, they regardless identified with them. As one fan of the novel told a newspaper reporter for the *Dallas Morning News* in 1890: "This is why we read 'Charlotte Temple,' because it is the true record of a woman."⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Cashmore, *Celebrity Culture*, 72.

⁷⁵ "At a Sorosis Meeting," *Dallas Morning News*, Dallas, Texas, June 15, 1890.

IV. “A melancholy tale have you unfolded”: Rituals of Mourning and Martyring

I. *Constructing the Fallen Woman*

In a momentary detour from discussions of affect, I want to illustrate exactly how the fallen woman is socially constructed as it is, of course, not the sexual impressions themselves that engender one’s social death and ruin, but the moral policing enforced by one’s community. This idea is at the core of what sociologist Émile Durkheim termed the “conscience collective”; that is, “[t]he totality of beliefs and sentiments common to average members of a society [that] forms a determinate system with a life of its own.”⁷⁶ Those “beliefs and sentiments” that the conscience collective maintains includes that society’s particular construction of morality. In order to enforce the moral boundaries of that society, the conscience collective punishes those individuals who violate those boundaries. As Durkheim writes, the conscience collective prescribes punishment in the hope that “the fear of punishment may paralyse those who contemplate evil.”⁷⁷ This system of moral circumscription in nineteenth-century America might be understood in the context of a history of puritanism which encouraged the purging of sinful members of society, so they could not “‘infect’ the whole community.”⁷⁸ The conscience collective dictated not only the social world of the nineteenth-century, but the literary world as well. The purging of deviant members of society, whether authors were critiquing or applauding it, was an important theme across nineteenth-century literature, within and beyond the seduction novel. Perhaps the most well known illustration of this comes from Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*. In *The Anatomy of National Fantasy*, Berlant considers how Hawthorne’s novel responds to and emerges out of an ongoing discourse concerning citizenship and national

⁷⁶ Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor In Society*, ed. Steven Lukes (New York: Free Press, 2014), 63.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁷⁸ Monica D. Fitzgerald, *Puritans Behaving Badly: Gender, Punishment, and Religion In Early America* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 4.

belonging. White male hegemony within the public sphere, meant that citizenship within the real and fictive world of the nineteenth-century, was largely exclusionary.⁷⁹ If one was denied the badge of citizenship on account of sexual or racial difference, or as a result of being “purged” from one’s community, how then might one express social and political grievances? Is an expression of these grievances even possible?

I argue that mourning provides the space for airing these grievances. I see the conscience collective and the intimate public as working together in the process of forming passionate attachment. The seduction novel reflects the moral policing of the conscience collective, creating emotionality among readers who can empathize with being subject to this moral policing, and thus engendering them to bond affectively through shared experience.

What is especially useful about this concept of moral policing (or deviance as it would begin to be called in the mid twentieth-century), for the purposes of interrogating the mourning of the fallen woman, is precisely the fact that it seems contradictory to eighteenth century conceptions of Lockean morality for one to express excessive sympathy for a woman that violated these moral boundaries. Charlotte and Eliza lose sight of their moral boundaries, violate codes of normative behavior, and are punished with social and physical death. By all accounts they should be *un-mournable*, and yet, their images were morphed so drastically outside of their fictional worlds that they were transformed from sexual deviants into martyrs.

The reason that the mourning of Charlotte and Eliza appears contradictory to eighteenth and nineteenth century social and moral principles is because it *was*. As Desirée Henderson explains in *Grief and Genre in American Literature*, circumscription of women’s conduct continued even after their death. Funeral sermons aided in constructing the image of the idyllic

⁷⁹ Lauren Berlant, *The Anatomy of National Fantasy: Hawthorne, Utopia, and Everyday Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 9.

woman. At funerals we typically prefer to remember the highs of an individual's life rather than the lows; however, the construction of virtue in the early American funeral sermon had a different aim. Upon hearing of the virtues of the deceased which earned them salvation, the attendee was meant to think of their own mortality, and remember their duty to live a similarly virtuous life. Given that the fallen woman met an un-virtuous end, she was "unrepresentable within the funeral sermon as the object of loss."⁸⁰ Henderson argues that by providing these fallen women interiority and making them sympathetic, the seduction novel makes the unmournable woman mournable. Rowson and Foster are able to so effectively engage the readers' sympathies by illustrating the fallen woman's ability to be redeemed. Virtuousness is reflected less in the unlucky events of one's life, and more in the character which they possess. Charlotte and Eliza are able to be mourned because they remain virtuous in their characters during their trials of immense suffering. More importantly, the suffering allows them to perform their virtuousness, and thus seek redemption and salvation. Rowson evidently demonstrates this in the following description of the final moments of Charlotte's life: "the tear of penitence blots their offences from the book of fate, and they rise from the heavy, painful trial, purified and fit for a mansion in the kingdom of eternity."⁸¹ Rowson appeals to the readers' sympathies, asking us to remember that Charlotte's illegitimate pregnancy, though it may define her social perception, it does not define her character.

Moreover, both novels place the reader at the scene of death, which directs the reader "to experience the heroine's death as a personal loss."⁸² On the final page of *The Coquette*, Foster placed an image of Eliza's headstone with the exact same inscription that appears on Elizabeth Whitman's headstone in Danvers, Massachusetts. At this point, Foster has convinced her

⁸⁰ Desirée Henderson, *Grief and Genre in American Literature, 1790-1870* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2016), 30.

⁸¹ Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*, 99.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 32.

audience that Eliza Wharton is someone who they should not only sympathize with, but feel that they know personally. To place the reader at Wharton's headstone in the moment when the readers' attachment to Wharton is deepest, Foster carefully contorts the reader into a position of mourning.

In line with Henderson's claims, I see the act of mourning the fictional fallen woman as being engendered by forces beyond rudimentary feelings of sympathy. The mourning of Charlotte and Eliza was a collective and public activity performed by female readers throughout their lifetimes. In 1900, a *New York Daily Tribune* report described the demographic of Charlotte Temple's visitors: "Two women, who must each be eighty now, and who have the appearance of being rich, have visited the grave with flowers for at least sixteen years, and I do not know how much longer."⁸³ Moreover, the mourning continued into the turn of the twentieth century, when knowledge of Charlotte's likely non-existence became popular knowledge. As a journalist for the *Washington Post* wrote in 1897:

At the risk of being charged with iconoclasm, we must have recourse to the not implausible hypothesis advanced by the late Felix Oldboy, who metaphorically lifted up the mysterious gravestone of Charlotte Temple and found beneath it no dust that was once a fair young life.⁸⁴

Following this claim, the journalist admits:

All this, however, is but a conjecture and lacking, as it does, the elements that give vitality to the traditions, is not likely to displace them. 'Charlotte Temple's grave' will not cease to attract gentle footsteps along that winding path and bid them pause

⁸³ "Charlotte Temple's Grave," *New-York tribune*, New York, New York, June 9, 1900.

⁸⁴ "MYSTERY OF A TOMS.: CHARLOTTE TEMPLE'S GRAVE IN TRINITY CHURCHYARD, NEW YORK," *The Washington Post*, Washington, D.C., May 9, 1897.

for memory's sake.⁸⁵

To the question of why readers formed such a passionate attachment to Charlotte and Eliza, one might express something akin to a sentiment Rowson herself utters:

I mean not to extenuate the faults of those unhappy women who fall victims to guilt and folly; but surely, when *we reflect how many errors we are ourselves subjected to*, how many secret faults lie hid in the recess of our hearts, which we should blush to have brought into open day (and yet those faults require the lenity and pity of a benevolent judge, or awful would be our prospect of futurity) I say, my dear Madam, when we consider this, we surely may *pity the faults of others*.⁸⁶

It is true—we have an instinct to sympathize with characters who we identify with to some degree, especially if we recognize our own faults or failings in their thoughts or actions. And, again, these acts of literary tourism would not have been completely out of the ordinary in the nineteenth-century. However, I see this moment of reader identification as being significant, not only as it is indicative of the broader social and political moment, but also in its interesting parallels to the way that contemporary fans engage with their favorite celebrities, and more importantly, the way that they respond when that celebrity dies.

II. *Celebrity Death*

In his book *Celebrity Worship*, Pete Ward defines celebrity as “the result of what media does to the representation of individuals, and the kinds of relationships that result between individuals who are represented in media, and those who consume these representations, and, as a result, have a relationship with mediated individuals.”⁸⁷ The feelings of intimacy that fans feel

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Rowson, *Charlotte Temple*, 67-68.

⁸⁷ Pete Ward, *Celebrity Worship* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 8.

between themselves and this mediated individual result in complicated feelings when this mediated individual dies. Though the relationship between the fan and celebrity may have been completely one-sided, when the celebrity dies, the fan may feel real grief, similar to what they might feel if they had lost a friend or family member. What I will endeavor to illuminate in this final section of my thesis are the parallels between early American and contemporary mourning of celebrity death and what these parallels can tell us about the continued utilization of the practice of public mourning as a form of expressing grief for not only the death itself, but for the social and political circumstances which may have engendered that death. For this analysis, I will thus be particularly focused on what I will term the “gone too soon” celebrity deaths—that is, the sudden and premature celebrity deaths which create a particular feeling of unjustness amongst fans.

When I make the connections between early American and contemporary forms of celebrity, I want to be clear in my recognition of the fact that major technological developments since the late eighteenth-century have in many ways changed the means through which fans interact with celebrities and how celebrities are born. In the contemporary era, mass media, a non-existent communicative form in the early republic, has only emphasized the phenomenon of “celebrity watching” as noted by Scott Radford and Peter Bloch.⁸⁸ My argument, however, is that the nature of the affective bonds between fan and celebrity since the late-eighteenth century has remained the same.

One of the central pillars of this affective bond that bridges the early American and contemporary periods is consumption. As Radford and Bloch note, fans attempt to gain proximity to their favorite celebrity through the things that they produce—photographs,

⁸⁸ Celebrity watching - meaning the monitoring of celebrities. Scott K. Radford and Peter H. Bloch, “Ritual, mythology, and consumption after a celebrity death,” in *Death In a Consumer Culture*, ed. Dobscha, Susan (London: Routledge, 2016), 108; *Ibid.*

merchandise, albums, and more.⁸⁹ When that celebrity dies, a way for fans to maintain that feeling of attachment to the celebrity is through a continued consumption of their products. Though mass consumption as we know it now did not exist in the early republic, consumption of the material productions of Charlotte and Eliza's fame was how fans generated intimacy between themselves and these women. In fact it was the *only* way they were able to generate this intimacy as Charlotte and Eliza were never alive to begin with. Though the visiting of wax shows that displayed Charlotte and Eliza's figures or a museum that showcased items belonging to Eliza is more akin to what we contemporarily think of as consuming the products of celebrity, it is the possession or viewing of any item related to the deceased person that is important for maintaining this connection—from breaking off pieces of Eliza's headstone to collecting newspapers clippings related to the novels. Moreover, when a celebrity dies, fans feel a tendency towards "post-death sacralization" and the value of their image, art, and items increase significantly in sentimental and market value.⁹⁰ Items that once seemed to have little importance—the harpsichord that Elizabeth Whitman played during her stay at the Danvers Tavern for instance—become idols of worship. As Pete Ward has helpfully illustrated, religious imagery has long been intertwined with celebrity culture often in an assessment of the celebrity as a figure of elevated importance, akin to that of a saint or martyr.⁹¹

The martyr image is a particularly important one to the creation of the post-mortem image of the celebrity who passed suddenly or prematurely. Cries of martyrdom often signify a general feeling of discontent within the fandom that the death was unjust. As a journalist wrote of *Charlotte Temple* in 1794:

It may be a Tale of Truth, for it is not unnatural, and it is a tale of real distress...

⁸⁹ Radford and Bloch, "Ritual, mythology, and consumption after a celebrity death," 115.

⁹⁰ Radford and Bloch, "Ritual, mythology, and consumption after a celebrity death," 113.

⁹¹ Ward, *Celebrity Worship*, 108.

Charlotte dies a martyr... we should feel for Charlotte if such a person ever existed, who for one error scarcely, perhaps, deserved so severe a punishment. If it is a fiction, poetic justice is not, we think, properly distributed.⁹²

Feelings of unjustness bring about forms of public mourning that express more than just grief for the death itself. When Diana, Princess of Wales was killed in a car crash on August 31, 1997, the large-scale public mourning that followed was brought on not only by the grief fans felt for the loss of their beloved “People’s princes”, but more broadly for what her death symbolized.⁹³

Diana was a humanitarian and an activist who embodied for many a new and hopeful influence within the royal family. Despite her seeming generosity and status as a beloved figure to the public, she was somewhat of a maligned and mistreated member of the royal family. Though the mourning that broke out after her death was largely a lament of her absence, it was just as much an “incitement against injustice.”⁹⁴ As Adrian Kear and Deborah Lynn Steinberg aptly put it: “Diana seemed to provide the theatrical opportunity through which the unspeakable losses felt in the exigencies of everyday life could be ‘acted out’.”⁹⁵ Though a discussion of Diana’s death may seem like a detour from Charlotte and Eliza, this observation from Kear and Steinberg is, in fact, at the heart of my analysis.

The utilization of mourning as a way of acting out the “losses felt in the exigencies of everyday life” is, I argue, precisely what is at play in the accounts of women publicly grieving for Charlotte Temple and Eliza Wharton throughout the nineteenth century. It is, moreover, why I argue that the mourning of Charlotte and Eliza was not simply a result of reader identification or the popularity of their corresponding novels. I see mourning as an act through which individuals

⁹² "Advertisement," *Gazette of the United States*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, June 20, 1794.

⁹³ Adrian Kear and Deborah Lynn Steinberg, *Mourning Diana: Nation, Culture, and the Performance of Grief* (London: Routledge, 1999), 4.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

can grieve not only the deceased individual, but the social and political circumstances which engendered the deceased individual's death and that which the living individual continues to endure.

As I have alluded to previously in this analysis, I argue that readers of *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* were participating in intimate public—which, as Berlant describes it, is a space in which “one senses that matters of survival are at stake and that collective mediation through narration and audition might provide some routes out of the impasse and the struggle of the present, or at least some sense that there would be recognition were the participants in the room together.”⁹⁶ In line with Berlant's theorization, I see mourning as providing the space for this “collective mediation through narration and audition.” Performing the affect of mourning as a collective in a public space allows the individual to create a utopian sphere in which “authenticity trumps ideology.”⁹⁷ Moreover, it provides a space to express shared frustration for the politics which govern one's sexual behavior without actually approaching the political sphere. For Charlotte and Eliza as well as Diana, mourning also became a medium through which fans might have their grievances recognized by other fans who share with them common emotional experiences. In the contemporary age of digital media where connecting with individuals in any part of the world has become more accessible, this feature of the mourning process has become even more prevalent.⁹⁸ In our contemporary moment, just as in the early republic, fans facilitate affective worlds in which their grieving—for their favorite celebrities and beyond—can be a shared cathartic experience. As one reporter wrote for the *Chicago Daily Tribune* in 1872:

And, for all that, why should they care to know about the last resting-place

⁹⁶ Lauren, Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 226.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁹⁸ Radford and Bloch, “Ritual, mythology, and consumption after a celebrity death,” 117.

of [Charlotte Temple]? Is there not about the same amount of unwritten, unspoken romance in everyday life? Believe me, there is. There are secrets as sad, and stories of suffering perhaps only a little less deep hidden in every grave, in every churchyard... The deepest tragedies, the saddest tales of suffering, and sorrow, and disappointment, are never known, are seldom even suspected by those most familiar with the every-day lives of the—to outward seeming—commonplace men and women who are the real heroes and heroines thereof.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ “Some Incidents of the Close of Mr. Seward’s Public Life. The Grave of Charlotte Temple -- Unknown Romances of Seemingly Commonplace Lives. A Trip to New England,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, Chicago, Illinois, October 16, 1872.

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