Troubling the Water: Dismantling the Ideology of Separate Spheres

Lisa Weddell

Follow this and additional works at: https://dsc.duq.edu/etd

Part of the Literature in English, North America Commons, Literature in English, North America, Ethnic and Cultural Minority Commons, and the Women's Studies Commons

Recommended Citation


This Immediate Access is brought to you for free and open access by Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Duquesne Scholarship Collection.
TROUBLING THE WATER:
DISMANTLING THE IDEOLOGY
OF SEPARATE SPHERES

A Dissertation
Submitted to McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Lisa L. Weddell

December 2019
TROUBLING THE WATER:
DISMANTLING THE IDEOLOGY
OF SEPARATE SPHERES

By
Lisa L. Weddell

Approved May 13, 2019

Dr. Faith Barrett
Associate Professor of English
(Committee Chair)

Dr. Laura Engel
Professor of English
(Committee Member)

Dr. Thomas Kinnahan
Associate Professor of English
(Committee Member)

Dr. James C. Swindal
Dean, McAnulty Graduate School of Arts
and Science

Dr. Greg Barnheisel
Chair, Department of English
Professor of English
ABSTRACT

TROUBLING THE WATER:
DISMANTLING THE IDEOLOGY
OF SEPARATE SPHERES

By
Lisa L. Weddell
December 2019

Dissertation supervised by Dr. Faith Barrett

This dissertation examines nineteenth century U.S. women’s maritime writings to re-evaluate and more accurately represent the roles women played in society. I contend that the nineteenth century ship is a microcosm of the United States and women’s sea experiences and maritime writings reveal their lived experiences and the visible roles they played in their relationships and in public politics. Women’s maritime writings, I argue, challenge ideologies of “True Womanhood” that define women as submissive and passive. Instead, these texts demonstrate how women equally contributed to establishing national identity in the United States by defining appropriate gender performance for men and women. My dissertation begins by discussing working class male sailors (and women who wrote about seafarers), then discusses women who passed as sailors, and concludes by examining middle-class women who accompanied their husbands to sea. I have
chosen this structure to reflect the hierarchical setting of a ship and also antebellum society. In Chapter One, I analyze Olaudah Equiano’s *The Interesting Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, The African*, Horace Lane’s *The Wandering Boy, Inconsiderate Sailor, and Result of Inconsideration*, and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*; reading these texts, I contend that failed performances of the “Christian Gentleman” are tied to the moral decay of antebellum society, such as the institution of slavery. In Chapter Two, I examine Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s “The Chivalric Sailor” and Emma Cole’s *The Life and Sufferings of Miss Emma Cole*; through these texts, I argue that women passing as seafarers model appropriate performances of masculinity and femininity and define U.S. citizenship through successful gender performances. Finally, in my last chapter, I consider the sea journals of Lucy Kendall, Margaret Fraser, and Hattie Atwood; analyzing these materials, I claim that women’s “private” maritime writings illustrate the power, independence, agency, and equality women wielded in their positions as wives, mothers, and daughters and how women’s roles progressed throughout the course of the nineteenth century.
DEDICATION

For the Heiry women: my Nana, Rita Heiry; my mother, Lynn Weddell; my aunts, Rita Yost and Jamie Dillon; my sister, Lauren Shmalberg; my sister-in-law Lauren Weddell; my niece, Lillian Weddell; and my cousin, Casey Dillon. These women have taught me to be strong, to work hard, and to be fiercely independent. I would not be who I am today without them, and this dissertation would not exist without their continued encouragement, love, and support.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am indebted to my community of scholars at Duquesne University, the Indiana University of Pennsylvania, and Chatham University. This project would not be possible without the support and encouragement I received from these universities.

First, I would like to thank my dissertation director, Dr. Faith Barrett. Through my program at Duquesne, Faith has modeled what it means to be a scholar and a teacher in academia. Her courses are filled with engaging and dynamic conversations, and she always provides insightful feedback. I have left her classes and our meetings feeling re-energized and re-invigorated about my research. She breathes new life and excitement into researching, writing, and teaching nineteenth century literature in the United States. I am also thankful to Dr. Thomas Kinnahan and Dr. Laura Engel, the other members on my dissertation committee, who have provided kind and constructive feedback throughout my program. Tom and Laura are brilliant scholars, and the material we covered in their classes during my Ph.D. coursework has largely shaped my research project and my approach to gender performance in the nineteenth century.

This project would also not be possible without the support I received from my MA advisor, Dr. Todd Thompson at IUP. Early in my MA program, Dr. Thompson encouraged my interest in maritime literature and nineteenth-century American literature. After the completion of my MA program, Dr. Thompson continued to support my research and development as a scholar. Finally, I am indebted to my mentor and advisor at Chatham University, Dr. William Lenz, who first introduced me to nineteenth century American and maritime literature. When I took his American Survey course as a
nineteen-year-old marketing major, I had no idea that it would drastically change the
direction of my life. His excitement and enthusiasm for research and literature is
contagious.

While my community of scholars have informed my interests, research, and
dissertation approaches, this project would not be possible without the love and support
of my family. My parents, Lynn and Bruce Weddell, have always believed in me and
encouraged me to follow my own path. From keeping my house stalked with chocolate,
to helping cover the upfront costs of research trips so I could financially survive until I
was reimbursed, to traveling with me when I presented my research internationally, they
have helped me achieve my goals.

My siblings, Eric and Lauren, are also an important part of my life, and their
continued support through the process means the world to me. Whenever I doubt myself,
they remind me that “I’m the f***ing s***.” Their encouragement has helped me through
some of the toughest days.

I am also grateful to my partner, Patrick Dalsass, who came into my life three
years into my Ph.D. program and for some reason decided to stay. He is patient,
understanding, and supportive, and I am grateful to the sacrifices he has made while I
finish my project and program. I always thought a serious relationship in graduate school
would be a distraction, but he inspires me to work harder and to be better in every aspect
of my life.

Finally, my dog Dickens has been my constant companion through graduate
school. Whether I am writing or reading, he is always by my side. His playfulness is
often a welcomed distraction and a reminder that life is dull with all work and no play.
He has also taught me if the worst thing in the world is muddy paws on a clean floor, then life is pretty good.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abstract</th>
<th>iv</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 1: The Enslaved Sailor, The Working Class Sailor, and Stowe’s Legree</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 2: The Female Sailor: The Perfect Woman</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter 3: Nineteenth-Century Middle Class Women: Revisiting the Archive, Re-evaluating Their Lives</td>
<td>116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afterward: Moving Forward, Looking Back</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Maritime Women: An Absent Presence

I trace my interest in maritime literature and history to my ancestor, Captain James Weddell, who discovered the “Weddell Sea” in the nineteenth century during the competition between the United States and European superpowers to discover and claim a southern, arctic land mass. Although he likely kept a journal or sea log about his experiences at sea, it did not survive and I have often wondered about his life as a sailor, captain, and explorer on the open water. Early in my academic career, my research centered on sailor narratives about South Sea exploration and how South Sea exploration and expansion established national identity in the United States.

As I continued to study antebellum maritime literature, I began to notice the “absent presence” of women at sea. Sailor narratives, maritime poetry, and maritime novels briefly allude to women, but these women often remain nameless and voiceless in sailor and maritime texts. Women linger on the outskirts of the pages, waiting for their voices to be uncovered, recovered, and finally heard. When I first encountered Abby Jane Morrell’s sea narrative, I knew that I had to write about women’s maritime writings, experiences, and how they, too, contribute to defining national identity in the United States during the nineteenth century. ¹

Throughout my dissertation I examine maritime women’s maritime writings and argue that nineteenth century women in the U.S. play an important role in defining

¹ Abby Jane Morrell accompanied her sea captain husband, Captain Benjamin Morrell to sea in the nineteenth century. It is important to note that I do not discuss Abby Morrell’s sea narrative in this dissertation because it is a ghost written account. While her experience is authentic, Knapp took editorial/authorial liberties that, I argue, probably distort Morrell’s lived experience while at sea. My focus in this dissertation is women’s sea experiences as they depict them in their own personal writings.
“ideal” masculinity and femininity. I argue that women, by emphasizing appropriate performances of gender and correct responses to their cultural settings, define U.S. citizenship and, more importantly, who has access to it. Antebellum women are not only moral influencers who encourage men to adhere to “Christian gentility,” a concept I define further in Chapter One, but also they define femininity to include agency, independence, virtue, piety, and purity. In the maritime literature I examine throughout this project, I contend that nineteenth century women are not submissive; nor are their roles based primarily on domestic activities in the home. Instead, in writing about their daily lives, women accurately represent their awareness, engagement, and involvement in the public, political issues of their contemporary moment.

Literary scholars’ and cultural historians’ attempts to accurately represent women’s roles in the nineteenth century are a point of interest among feminist scholars. Until the later half of the 20th century, few women writers had a place in the canon, and thus, little was known about their lives, experiences, and roles in society. In 1966, in an attempt to define U.S. women as active members of society nineteenth-century society, Barbara Welters critically analyzed women’s roles by emphasizing femininity and their responsibilities within the home and family. Welter defined the four cardinal virtues of true womanhood in the nineteenth century as piety, purity, submission, and domesticity. She argued that middle-class American women willingly accepted the roles men placed on them and adhered to the “cult of true womanhood” and that working class women and women of color aspired to be members of this cult.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, feminist scholarship emerged that challenged Welter’s claims and began to discuss women’s agency and roles in the nineteenth
century. These scholars, including Linda Kerber, Cathy Davidson, and Amy Kaplan, among others, were largely influenced by Judith Butler. In Butler’s groundbreaking work, *Gender Trouble*, she argues that gender is an improvised performance; sex and gender are both constructed categories. Butler destabilizes the category of “woman” and thus challenges the traditional roles associated with womanhood:

Apart from the foundationalist fictions that support the notion of the subject, however, there is the political problem that feminism encounters in the assumption that the term *women* denotes a common identity. Rather than a stable signifier that commands the assent of those whom it purports to describe and represent, *women*, even in the plural has become a troublesome term, a site of contest, a cause for anxiety. (3)

Butler suggests that women, as a category, are troublesome because womanhood is not a collective identity or experience. Among many factors, class, race, ethnicity, and background complicate a woman’s experience. According to Butler, women’s experiences have been “grossly misrepresented” (5). In an attempt to more accurately represent women’s lived experiences, nineteenth century feminist literary scholars seek to more fully comprehend women, their work, and their gender performances.

Butler was instrumental in arguing that sex and gender are cultural constructions and that masculinity and femininity are a performance one plays in order to be accepted by society. In the 1980s and 1990s, feminist scholars began the vital work of recovering women’s texts and voices and emphasized the significance of women’s work in the domestic space during the nineteenth century. For example, Linda K. Kerber advanced the ideology of Republican Motherhood, arguing that women in the nineteenth century
promoted the ideals of the republic through childrearing. Kerber and the scholars of her era placed nineteenth century women on a pedestal as custodians of civic virtues who were responsible for upholding the morality of their husbands and children.

Though Kerber’s concept of the “Republican Mother” accentuates the important roles women played in the nineteenth century, her argument relies on the notion of separate spheres and suggests that women influenced public policy only through the agency they held as wife and mother. She fails to acknowledge the ways in which women shaped public policy through their own autonomy. Building from Butler and Kerber, the collection No More Separate Spheres! (2002) defines separate spheres as an ideology, a system of ideals rather than an actuality, and calls readers and scholars to critically think about the ways in which women participated in public policy and shaped U.S. society.

Feminist scholars, such as Cathy Davidson, Amy Kaplan, and Dana D. Nelson argue strongly against the binary model of public versus private spheres and masculinity versus femininity. While masculinity and femininity are often placed in opposition to each other, they share a number of similar characteristics. To start, both are constantly in flux; gender, or rather the performance of gender, shifts to meet the expectations of an ever-changing society. Further, an individual’s performance of their gender is dependent on a number of different variables including (but not limited to) race, gender, class, socioeconomic status, geographic location, and familial background.

During the nineteenth century in the U.S., “ideal” performances of gender, although unrealistic, are problematically based on Anglo-Saxon white protestant (WASP) middle-class expectations of how gender should be performed. To define gender performance as either “ideal” or “flawed” is to narrow the broad spectrum of gender
identities and how they are performed. Yet, “ideal” gender performance, as K. Kippola argues, is placed on a pedestal and results in an individual’s acceptance by middle-class, dominant society: “If the role is assumed and acted effectively, the individual male [or female] is rewarded with conclusion and acceptance” (2). These scholars redefined women’s roles in the nineteenth century and began the important work of dismantling the ideology of separate spheres.

As my interest in women writers and recovery work grew, I began, like Davidson, Kerber, and Kaplan, to see the ways in which nineteenth century women writers “pushed back” against how dominant middle-class society defined women’s roles as women, daughters, wives, and mothers. Nineteenth century women writers crafted female characters and personas who wield agency and authority throughout the plot or poem. I recognized that not only did women “push back” against cultural expectations of femininity, but also they influenced how masculinity should be performed. Though feminist scholars discuss the power and agency women wield inside and outside of the home and how the expectations they placed on gender performance built and shaped U.S. society, little remains known about women’s maritime experiences and how female seafarers challenged and redefined U.S. femininity in the nineteenth century. The theories and readings of feminist scholars in the 1990s and early 2000s inform my own approach to understanding women’s maritime writings and how they represent their roles, agency, and involvement in nineteenth century society.
I. Maritime Literature and Women’s Writing: A Common Ground?

When I inform individuals, within and outside of academia, that I study nineteenth century U.S. maritime literature, I am often met with silence and a puzzled look as they scramble to think of an example.


While *Moby-Dick* ranks among one of my favorite canonical novels, my appreciation of the novel is largely based on sailor narratives and how they shape my reading of Melville’s leviathan. My fascination with sailor narratives grows from my personal interest in the United States history and the important role that the seafaring and whale-fishery industries played in building nationhood. The maritime, as I further discuss in chapter one, was involved in every aspect of American society. From commerce, to trade, to exploration, sailors – both physically and metaphorically – defined the borders of nationhood. I argue that the success of the young nation and its emergence as a world competitor is tied to the United States’ sea history. Further, sailors acted as liaisons between the nation and the “other,” and antebellum society expected sailors to model citizenship at the same time that these sailors were denied access to it at home.

Sailor narratives, such as Richard Henry Dana Jr.’s *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840), expose class and hierarchy issues that reflect problems at the root of U.S. society and demonstrate how sailors, as members of the working class, are denied access to citizenship. Though Dana, as a wealthy upper-class, college educated Bostonian writes from a place of privilege, *Two Years Before the Mast* reveals the harsh realities of sea life, humanizes the sailor, and demonizes the sea captain. For example, in one of the most
famous scenes from *Two Years Before the Mast*, Dana depicts the flogging of an innocent sailor, Sam, and challenges the captain’s right to abuse his sailors at sea:

‘I’m not negro slave’ said Sam.

‘Then I’ll make you one,’ said the captain; and he came to the hatchway, and sprang on deck, threw off his coast, and rolling up his sleeves, called out to the mate, ‘Seize that man up, Mr. Amerzene! Seize him up! Make a spread eagle of him! I’ll teach you who is master aboard!’ (89)

This scene exposes the captain’s authority at sea, the abuse of his power, and the lack of sailors’ rights. Sam is flogged because he asks a question, which the captain interprets as a threat to his authority. In this scene, Dana presents Sam’s innocence and suggests that the sailors are only guilty of demanding their captain’s respect. In Dana’s narrative, the captain is villainized for failing to adhere to the tenets of Christian gentility.

Dana, by highlighting captain cruelty at sea, points to the important work sailors perform in building nationhood and publicizes the uncalled for injustices sailors experience at sea and on land. However, throughout the narrative, Dana writes as an outsider. His employment as a sailor is a temporary, social experiment and his emotional distance from the crew suggests that he remains an observer rather than a participant in their community. Dana’s narrative challenges the performance of masculinity by elite, white men in society and exposes their behavior as inappropriate. His narrative also challenges sailor stereotypes and presents his shipmates as hardworking, loyal men who deserve access to U.S. citizenship. Though Dana wrote *Two Years Before the Mast* to improve the lot of the common jack tar, his maritime narrative also critiques middle-and-upper class society’s apathy toward the sailors’ condition.
Working class sailor writers, enslaved seafaring writers, and women sea-going writers also challenge society in similar ways to Dana. For example, in Phillis Wheatley’s poem “Ocean,” Wheatley critiques captain behavior and draws attention to the cruelty sailors endure at sea. Though Wheatley published her poetry as an enslaved individual, she wrote with a middle-to-upper class audience in mind. In her poem “Ocean,” Wheatley, like her late eighteenth century middle-class readers, is critical of gentility and decorum.² Wheatley critiques Captain Calef’s cruelty when he shoots and kills an eagle during the voyage:

T’was but e’er now an Eagle young and gay
Pursu’d his passage thro’ the ariel way [.]  
He aim’d his piece, would C – f’s hands do more [?]  
Yes, him he brought to Pluto’s dreary shore[.]  
Slow breathed his last, the painful minutes move  
With lingering pace his rashness reprove;  
Perhaps his father’s Just commands his bore  
To fix dominion on some distant shore[.] (41 – 48)

Though Wheatley describes the death of the eagle at the hands of Captain Calef, in this passage she is careful not to mention his full name nor to pass explicit judgement on his actions or behavior. As an enslaved woman, Wheatley avoids outwardly expressing her opinion about the captain’s character. I argue that there is complexity in the poem and that the death of the eagle reveals and critiques hierarchical dynamics of ship life.

² “Ocean” was drafted during a sea voyage from July 1773 to September 1773 on the Land Packet, and it was included in the second edition of her collection Poems (1779).
Hilene Franzbaum argues that in Wheatley’s poetry there is a “layer of ambiguity and density that has previously gone unrecognized” (74). As a metaphor, the bald eagle in “Ocean” represents freedom. Though the eagle was not officially selected as the national symbol of the United States until the Second Continental Congress in 1782, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and John Adams incorporated the bird into the official seal of the United States during the First Continental Congress. It is therefore likely that the image of the bald eagle was largely circulated as a symbol of patriotism to represent the freedom and strength of the new nation. Therefore, Wheatley’s metaphor of the eagle succumbing to its demise at the hands of the captain further elucidates the treatment of sailors at sea. In the nineteenth century, as Olaudah Equiano’s, Horace Lane’s, and Richard Henry Dana’s narratives show, the sea is romanticized as a transcendental, inviting place of freedom and adventure. The eagle, as a metaphor and national symbol, also represents adventure and freedom. Yet, sailor narratives expose the reality of shipboard life. The patriarchal society, rigid hierarchies, and severe discipline aboard stripped many sailors of their independence. Sailors’ conditions at sea largely depend on the captain’s kindness or cruelty. Thus, Wheatley’s poem about the eagle’s death is about the treatment of sailors by the captain at sea. As both an observer at sea and an enslaved woman, Wheatley carefully crafts the metaphor of the eagle to depict the captain’s brutality to convey sailors’ lost liberties at sea. In “Ocean,” Wheatley calls attention to injustices in society. Through the setting of the sea and the metaphor of the eagle, Wheatley asks readers to consider the conditions of liberty and enslavement. “Ocean” draws attention to the sea captain’s behavior and the sailors’ conditions. Together, Dana’s and Wheatley’s texts show how maritime writings by the enslaved, working class, and
middle-upper class men and women expose tensions in society such as proper
demonstrations of masculinity and political issues, including abolition and the seafarers’
plight.

*Two Years Before the Mast* provides a wealth of knowledge about sea life and the
sailors’ plight, but working class sailors’ voices have been and remain excluded from the
canon. In the early years of my graduate research, I became interested in sailor voices and
how they recorded and felt about their lived experiences. How do they critique white,
middle class masculinity? How do they represent themselves and their experiences in
their texts? And how do they define themselves as American citizens? These same
questions shape my research about women’s maritime writings in the nineteenth century.
I am largely indebted to scholars such as Hester Blum, Myra C. Glenn, Brian Rouleau,
Jason Berger, and Paul Gilje who not only informed my reading of sailor narratives but
introduced me to archival research and the importance of it in literary studies. Together,
these scholars use sailor narratives to challenge conventional views of U.S. history,
literature, and national identity in the nineteenth century. Paul Gilje’s *Liberty on the
Waterfront* (2003) offers a cultural historian’s perspective on what liberty meant to U.S.
sailors. Gilje’s research focuses on U.S. sailors and their resistance to the British during
the American Revolution and the events leading up to the War of 1812, such as
impressment.³ Gilje’s groundbreaking study further demonstrates how sailors defended
the nation’s independence from Great Britain while also enacting their own,
individualized notions of liberty.

³ During the Seven Years War and after, the British navy impressed men into forced labor
at sea. During the American Revolution and the events leading up to the War of 1812, the
British navy continued to force American citizens into “forced” labor at sea.
Following Gilje’s publication, Myra C. Glenn’s *Jack Tar’s Story: The Autobiographies and Memoirs of Sailors in Antebellum America* (2010) analyzes the autobiographies of eighteenth and nineteenth century sailors and explores manhood and nationalism in the Early Republic. Like Gilje, Glenn focuses on the working class sailors as individuals, and she writes about how they remembered and inscribed various events such as the American Revolution, the Barbary Wars, the Haitian Revolution, and the War of 1812. Glenn contends that antebellum sailors were instrumental in defining manhood and citizenship in the United States.

Hester Blum’s pioneering *The View from the Masthead: Maritime Imagination and Antebellum Sea Narratives* (2008) offers a literary critique of seamen and their communities. Blum’s study was the first literary analysis of sailor narratives and maritime writings. She focuses on first-person narratives of antebellum seafarers, such as Dana, as well as fictional works by well-known U.S. authors such as James Fenimore Cooper, Edgar Allan Poe, and Herman Melville. Blum argues that seafarers’ narratives offer a method for envisioning working class labor in the nineteenth century and the broad applications it has for re-evaluating antebellum literature and history.

Building from Blum, Jason Berger’s *Antebellum at Sea* (2012) offers a literary approach to exploring antebellum sailors and the role they played in society as well as in trade and developing a global market. Through his literary analysis, Berger challenges antebellum stereotypes about sailors and their roles in society. Finally, Brian Rouleau’s *With Sails Whitening Every Sea: Mariners and the Makings of an American Empire* (2014) examines maritime memoirs and argues, through a historian’s perspective, that sailors represented the U.S. in the nineteenth century. He argues that their problematic
actions in foreign ports (such as womanizing, intemperance, and rowdy behavior) shaped how other nations viewed the U.S. Rouleau exposes the instrumental role sailors and their maritime networks played in connecting the Early Republic to the rest of the world. Gilje, Glenn, Blum, Berger, and Rouleau studies were instrumental in highlighting the importance of sailor labor and sailor contributions to building national identity during the Early Republic. These scholars also suggest that sailor narratives ask us to re-evaluate traditional notions of antebellum life and working class contributions to establishing national identity. They are instrumental in shaping my thoughts about how women, too, contributed to establishing citizenship in the Early Republic and how an analysis of women’s maritime writings provides a more accurate representation of women’s experiences in the nineteenth century.

Gilje, Glenn, Blum, Bergers, and Rouleaus studies largely contributed to the academe’s acceptance of maritime narratives as their own genre and not a sub-genre of the travel narrative as they had previously been defined. Though sea narratives largely borrow from the travel narrative, the conversion/spiritual narrative, and the slave narrative, they share characteristics that are unique to their own genre. As Blum points out, these narratives are circular in nature: they begin and end in port. Glenn further offers that maritime narratives are highly structured texts that follow a pattern. For example, numerous sailor narratives begin with the sailor’s reflection of his adolescent yearning for the sea. In the beginning of a narrative, the sea is romanticized as an adventurous escape from dull shore life. Many of these sailors, although not all, are from working class backgrounds, and at a young age, they view seafaring as an appealing alternative to their apprenticeship in a trade. Next, maritime memoirs describe life at sea,
and these descriptions often include information about the hierarchy at sea and their place within the hierarchy (e.g. captain, mates, skilled laborers [carpenter, cook, harpooners, etc.], veteran sailors, green sailors, steward, and cabin boys), pay, duty, responsibilities, and living arrangements. Often the harsh realities of seafaring such as accidents, punishment, sickness, and death are highlighted and the writer departs from their previous visions of idyllic sea life.

Sailor narratives also provide details about the captain’s behavior and his treatment of the crew. According to Matthew Raffety, three metaphors are associated with the captain’s patriarchal position at sea: father, schoolmaster, and slave master. Further, in all narratives there is a description of foreign ports and a desire to return to American society. Finally, because antebellum society stereotypes sailors as an “amphibian class of men” and critiques their performance of masculinity as too unrestrained, antebellum society stereotyped sailors as rowdy, intemperate, unethical men because they only saw them in port, on leave. At sea, sailors were tasked with difficult responsibilities, and society’s view of these sailors as grown boys is an inaccurate representation of their identities. Maritime memoirists often use their narratives to revise the ways dominant society views sailors as individuals, and many memoirists and narrators detail their reform, such as their pledge of temperance or their conversion to Christianity, to demonstrate their acceptance of middle-class U.S. values and their rightful position as U.S. citizens.

While women have largely been excluded from the “master narrative” of the Golden Age of Sail, the recovery of their maritime texts further elucidates the extent to which they were integral to and involved in every aspect of maritime life. Women owned
and operated sailor boarding homes; they were sailor wives and shipbuilder wives who mended sailor clothes for extra income; they were humanitarian activists who advocated for sailor welfare and rights; they were sea passengers, daughters/wives who accompanied their fathers/husbands to sea, and also women, who surprisingly, passed as sailors at sea.

As the interdisciplinary field of maritime studies has grown over the last twenty years, scholars, such as Joan Druett, Lisa Norling, and Margaret S. Creighton, have begun to dismantle the cultural myth that the ship was a homosocial space that women could not access. Druett’s, Norling’s, and Creighton’s work examines women’s maritime narratives and revises our understanding of nineteenth century maritime history to include women. Creighton’s and Norling’s *Iron Men, Wooden Women: Gender and Seafaring in the Atlantic World, 1700-1920* (1996) explores the relationships of gender in seafaring communities and challenges male-only models of gender behavior within these communities, at sea and on shore. As cultural historians, Creighton and Norling destabilize the myths about women’s roles within the Golden Age of Sail. Their work has lain the foundation for future scholars to further consider and analyze women’s maritime writings and how women participated within seafaring and antebellum communities.

Joan Druett’s *Hen Frigates: Passion and Peril, Nineteenth-Century Women at Sea* (1998) uses the maritime manuscripts of nineteenth century women to construct a historical perspective of life at sea for women who accompanied their husbands. The aim of her project is to “convey a general picture of the lifestyles” women and girls led at sea (11). By analyzing their journals and diaries, Druett provides her reader with a cultural history of women at sea. Like *Iron Men, Wooden Women*, Druett deconstructs the stereotype that
the sea was a masculine and homosocial space inaccessible to women. While Creighton, Norling, and Druett’s work is vital to understanding nineteenth century maritime women’s writing and women’s roles at sea, questions about women’s maritime experiences remain: What were women’s roles at sea, and how did they negotiate these roles within the space of the ship? Though these scholarly works offer a cultural history about women at sea, I argue that women’s maritime writing challenges gender performance at the same time they reinforce “ideals” about gender, especially masculinity. Women’s maritime narratives further complicate our understanding of nineteenth century women’s roles.

Though cultural historians have pointed to the importance of women’s maritime writings, few literary critics have acknowledged the importance of nineteenth century women’s maritime writings or the use of the maritime in texts that are largely considered “non-maritime.” For example, in Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *Hope Leslie* (1827), one of the most violent moments in the novel occurs at sea when sailors threaten Hope (and Rosa’s) safety. Though Hope and Everett’s love story and Magawisca’s rescue overshadow these minor plot developments, Sedgwick’s use of these maritime spaces and identities offers a powerful critique of class, identity, decorum, and masculinity. Similarly, in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1851), Harriett Beecher Stowe casts Legree—Tom’s cruelest master—as a former seafarer in order to criticize rough masculinity, demonize the sailor, and humanize the slave. Though Sedgwick and Stowe’s novels both engage in the work of “domesticity” by attempting to govern and define an appropriate form of masculinity, femininity, and decorum, their narratives when read alongside sailor
narratives, such as Lane’s *The Wandering Boy* demonstrate that women, like men, challenged and defined gender performance and roles in society.

Throughout my dissertation, I place fiction by canonical women writers, such as Stowe and Sedgwick, in conversation with maritime accounts by sailors and seafaring women. Together, these writers more accurately inform us about the nineteenth century and individuals’ lived experiences in the United States: Does the “maritime” represent society as a whole, and if so, how? How do women’s maritime writings inform us about nineteenth century society in the United States and women’s roles within it? What can maritime texts teach us about women’s, the working class’, and minorities’ lived experiences, and further, how do maritime texts define U.S. citizenship?

II. Chapter Outline

My dissertation begins by discussing working class male sailors (and women who wrote about seafarers), then discusses women who passed as sailors, and concludes by examining middle-class women who accompanied their husbands to sea. I have chosen this structure to reflect the hierarchical setting of a ship and also antebellum society. My chapters examine the performance of gender and maritime identities to demonstrate how women actively and visibly engaged in defining nationhood.

Each chapter opens with a brief analysis of a sea shanty because these songs communicate ideals about society and gender performance. The shanty provides commentary on a captain’s appropriate or inappropriate behavior, and they inform sailors how they should perform their masculinity, often emphasizing strength, courage, and compassion. Additionally, since a large number of sea shanties are adapted from popular
music in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, these songs elucidate popular culture’s expectations about gender and class performance.

To provide further context, shanties are work-songs that were sung to accompany sailor labor. These songs are adaptations of popular ballads as well as original songs crafted by sailors based on their lived experiences. Sailors used shanties (also referred to as “chanteys”) to establish a working rhythm at sea. While captains likely encouraged their crews to sing shanties as a way to set the pace of their labor, shanties also encouraged participation in and the establishment of community. Like slave spirituals, the shanty elicits a call and encourages a response from members of the crew. As the shanty man “calls” with a verse, the crew “responds” by joining in the chorus or echoing the lines. This call and response establishes a fraternity among the mariners and helps them cope with difficult or dangerous situations. For seafarers, the shanty is also a coded language, communicating dangers or frustrations, and like yarns, they provide seafarers with an opportunity to cope with trauma as a member of the community. For example, popular shanty topics include sea deaths or accidents, long voyages, captains, women, shore life, sea battles, and young or passing sailors.

Chapter One of my dissertation, “The Enslaved Sailor, the Working Class Sailor, and Stowe’s Sailor,” analyzes society’s idealization of Christian gentility and how failed performances of Christian gentility are tied to corruption in American society. Reading Olaudah Equiano’s narrative *The Interesting Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (1789), Horace Lane’s sailor memoir *The Wandering Boy, Careless Sailor, or Result of Inconsideration* (1839), and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1851), this chapter argues that these writers use
maritime identities to emphasize the importance of white gentility, advocate for humanitarian activity, and define proper behavior for their audiences.

In Chapter Two, “The Female Sailor: The Perfect Woman,” I analyze the eighteenth and nineteenth century phenomenon of women passing as sailors by examining Catharine Sedgwick’s short story “The Chivalric Sailor” (1835) and Emma Cole’s narrative The Life and Sufferings of Miss Emma Cole: Being a Faithful Narrative of Her Life (1844). Reading these representations of women cross-dressing as sailors, I argue that these women model appropriate performances of femininity and masculinity and define U.S. citizenship through their successful performances. These two texts also warn about the consequences that are associated with failed performances of identity. The “Chivalric Sailor” and The Life and Sufferings define femininity and masculinity in antebellum society to include independence, strength, purity, and morality. In these narratives, individuals who correctly perform their gender to meet society’s expectations are rewarded.

My final chapter, “Nineteenth Century Middle-Class Women at Sea: Revisiting the Archive, Re-Evaluating Women’s Lives,” examines the journals of middle-and-upper middle class women who went to sea as captain wives, daughters, and passengers. In this chapter, I argue that these women, while placing pressure on their husbands, fathers, captains, and male passengers to behave appropriately and according to their class status also set the stage for the concept of “New Womanhood” and women’s independence at the end of the century. I show that women’s personal accounts of their sea experiences reveal that middle-class women did not need to pass in order to gain access to new experiences. In this chapter, I analyze Margaret Fraser’s journal she kept while she
accompanied her captain husband at sea, Lucy Kendall’s journal she kept as a passenger during her mid-century voyage to California, and Hattie Atwood’s sea narrative, *Around the World in 500 Days*, which is penned from the journal she kept while she accompanied her father at sea.

In my afterword, “Moving Forward: Looking Back,” I analyze Sena Jeter Nasland’s *Ahab’s Wife, Or, The Star Gazer* and Disney’s *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Black Pearl* as both the novel and the film feature strong, independent seafaring women who choose their own paths. These texts not only revise American history to visibly include women, but also define femininity and masculinity for the cultural, historical moment in which they were produced. In the closure to my dissertation, I argue that *Ahab’s Wife* and *Pirates of the Caribbean* offer a reflection of their contemporary moment by rewriting the past.
Chapter 1

The Enslaved Sailor, the Working Class Sailor, and Stowe’s Legree

What do Olaudah Equiano, the relatively unknown sailor Horace Lane, and Harriet Beecher Stowe have in common? Though it sounds like the beginning of a bad joke, these three writers and their texts share many similarities through their avocation for humanitarian activism and their critique of middle-and-upper class white gentility. Equiano’s narrative, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (1789), Lane’s narrative, *The Wandering Boy, Careless Sailor, and Result of Inconsideration* (1839), and Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1851) all use maritime themes to advocate for the abolition of slavery, draw attention to sailor rights, and define proper behavior for their audiences.

Canonically, maritime literature is classified as texts that are set at sea or portray the relationship between humans and the sea. As more maritime texts are recovered and studied, the definition of maritime writing has expanded to include texts that cover any aspect of sea life rather than writing that is primarily set or themed around the ocean. This expanded category, I argue, includes literary texts such as *The Interesting Life of Olaudah Equiano* and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* because of their representation of maritime individuals and settings even though scholars have not typically analyzed these pieces through a maritime lens. In the United States during the late eighteenth and nineteenth century, the sea was an economic means of survival for individuals, seaport communities, and the nation. Seaports were the economic engines of the country, as imports, exports, and capital circulated wealth and goods locally and internationally through harbors, and
maritime activities, such as exploration and trade, defined the United States as a country of economic means and industry. For example, the whale-fishery industry not only dispersed marketable goods into the U.S. economy, but also developed the hunt for sperm whales and seal skins led to exploration and expansion in the South Seas. The United States maritime identity contributed to the Early Republic’s ability to thrive amongst the European superpowers, such as Great Britain, that dominated the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The sea was essential to U.S. society, and thus it is not surprising that the “maritime” finds its place in literature that is not typically considered to be about the sea. Many nineteenth century U.S. writers turned to the sea for literary inspiration. The popularity of sea novels, such as James Fenimore Cooper’s novels of the 1820s, shows that U.S. readers craved adventure, bravery, and national triumph. His sea novels also position the ship and sea life as a microcosm of the nation. I argue that the presence of the maritime in U.S. literature in the nineteenth century raises questions about how authority is exercised in democracy.

*The Interesting Life of Olaudah Equiano, The Wandering Boy,* and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* use the maritime to depict how the abuse of power and improper demonstrations of masculinity threaten Anglo-American antebellum society. *The Interesting Life* is not only a slave narrative, but also a maritime memoir because so much of the narrative takes place at sea. Stowe’s novel, though set on a series of the Southern plantations, casts Tom’s cruelest master, Simon Legree, as a former seafarer. As a maritime memoir, Lane’s narrative too, critiques American institutions such as slavery and links the seafarers’ plight with other humanitarian movements. All three texts use maritime experiences and settings to advocate for the abolition of slavery, petition for sailors’
rights, and emphasize proper behavior for men (and women). Through their use of the maritime setting, Equiano, Lane, and Stowe, despite their marginalized positions as minorities in society (black, working class, and female), use their pens to highlight the injustices caused in American society by white elite men’s failure to act with the grace and decorum their position in society demands.

By the close of the eighteenth century and the dawn of the nineteenth century, U.S. (and European) society viewed boisterous demonstrations of masculinity negatively and favored a more evangelical and refined model. Charles Rosenberg suggests that the spiritual reformation of the Second Great Awakening influenced this shift through reform movements that encouraged society to remedy the evils associated with all aspects of U.S. civilization. I argue, however, that to narrow the shift in U.S. masculinity to one specific event in history simplifies the complexity of masculinity and discredits the multiple and competing variations of masculinity that exist throughout the nineteenth century. Ideals of masculinity in the nineteenth century, are complex, and it is important to remember that class, race, geographic location, socio-economic background, and religion and societal concerns influence the performance of masculinity. As I discuss the ideology of the “Christian Gentleman” throughout this dissertation, we must remember that this is white middle class society’s idealization of masculinity and while repression, control, and self-denial are important indicators of an individual’s appropriate performance of masculinity, U.S. men performed their masculinity in different ways.

Nineteenth century evangelicals defined masculinity as the performance of repression, control, and self-denial, and antebellum society increasingly encouraged men to practice these ideals as society stressed the demonstration of masculinity through an
individual’s noble acts and virtue. Rosenberg states, “lack of control…was seen as animalistic, as characteristics of a brutal, less highly organized being” (141). Although the idealization of the “Christian Gentleman” was upper and middle class based, it also affected the performance of masculinity in the working classes. If, as E.P. Thompson suggests, class is a relationship and not a defined structure between groups, then performing control, repression, and self-denial could provide members of the working class with entry into middle-class society and access to economic stability. For example, In *The Wandering Boy*, Lane aspires to practice Christian gentility, and in his narrative he notes that he must reform his behavior and show his adoption of middle-class values before he can be accepted by antebellum society and access economic stability. While this idealized vision of U.S. masculinity offered working class men a way to access middle-class society, it also compelled working class men to control their bodies. Christian gentility was endorsed (although not always performed) by members of the upper-classes who feared labor uprisings and revolts. As I will further discuss in Lane’s narrative, an individual’s practice of control, repression, and self-denial signaled one’s assimilation into the middle-class, whereas one’s lack of control signaled their indifference to shared U.S. values, thus labeling them as “other” despite their white identity. The fear of being labeled as “other” forced working and middle-class men to perform a masculinity that adhered to the code of Christian gentility.

Though Rosenberg traces the ideology of the Christian gentleman to the Second Great Awakening, discussions of gentility began to circulate as early as the eighteenth century in Great Britain. Gentility emerged as a concept and was linked to the economic shift in European society from a feudal system to a free market. The changes that resulted
from the free market changed the economy and redistributed wealth, which also redefined the social order. Deborah Valenze argues that the circulation of money due to the free-market economy established anxieties about the social order: “money could reinforce the hierarchical obligations; yet it might introduce competing suggestions of opportunity invested in circulation” (11). Money could work to further separate the classes, but the circulation of money also had the potential to restructure society and threaten the position of the gentry and aristocracy. Speculations about the identity of a “true” gentleman began to emerge in the eighteenth century due to the anxieties associated with the circulation of wealth such as class, behavior, and identity.

During this era, conduct manuals began to circulate among the elite and educated classes in an effort to define the “gentleman.” The need for conduct manuals that explain gentility signals an anxiety about the performance of masculinity because wealth was no longer an indicator of one’s social class by the beginning of the eighteenth century. For example, Allen Ramsey, writing in the eighteenth century, defines British gentility: “If thou has a good Soul, good Education, art Virtuous, well qualified in the Conditions, Honest, Ingenuous, Learned; hating all baseness, thou art a true Gentleman, nay perfectly Noble, though born of Thersite” (Ramsey qtd Solinger 19). For Ramsey, one’s background does not matter in their classification as a gentleman. In an increasingly polite society, behavior functions as a marker of gentility. Ramsey highlights refinement, behavior, education, and virtue as important characteristics of gentility. Further, literary scholar J.D. Solinger suggests that a man’s ability to adapt his behavior to situations and circumstances entitles him to the status of a gentleman: “The ability to read others and to modify and modulate one’s behavior according to social context, for good or for ill,
would become, over the course of the long eighteenth century, one of the gentleman’s signature skills” (31). Essentially, masculinity and gentility are personas that men of wealth were expected to appropriately perform. If changes to the eighteenth century European economy resulted in a crisis of gentility in the eighteenth century, one could also argue that revisions and new definitions of gentility arose in the U.S. after the American Revolution and during the onset of the industrial revolution. U.S. independence and the dawn of industrialization reshaped the U.S. economy and restructured society. Therefore, it is not surprising that U.S. anxieties related to the changes in society are reflected in nineteenth century literary texts.

This chapter examines Equiano’s narrative, *The Wandering Boy*, and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in order of publication date to illuminate the increased importance that Anglo-American society placed on practicing Christian gentility and appropriately performing masculinity. By analyzing these three texts in order of publication date, I contend that these texts show how U.S. society increasingly placed pressure on U.S. men and their performance of masculinity as the century progressed. Finally, the grouping of these texts and their order further demonstrates the equal emphasis that men and women placed on decorum in society. Women, as I demonstrate in this chapter and throughout the dissertation, were actively engaged in the politics and issues of their contemporary moment. Though Equiano, Lane, and Stowe wrote with different agendas in mind, their use of maritime settings and their critiques of Christian gentility demonstrate each writer’s awareness of cultural concerns and their involvement in shaping public society. *The Interesting Life, The Wandering Boy*, and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* dismantle the ideology
of separate spheres by showing minorities’, members of the working class’, and women’s involvement in national affairs.

The sea shanty, “The Cruel Ship’s Captain” further elucidates how the maritime is used in this chapter to critique the abuse of power and inappropriate displays of masculinity.\(^4\) I place it here as a way to contextualize Christian gentility and society’s critique of violent demonstrations of masculinity by those in power. The sea shanty tells of a captain’s unchecked authority at sea and the negative consequences of displaying masculinity through violence and force:

A boy was bound apprentice
Because his parents they were poor
So I took him from St. James workhouse
All for sail on the Greenland shore.
One day this poor boy did annoy me.
Nothing to him then did I say,
But I rushed him to my frozen yard-arm
And I kept him there till the very next day.
When his eyes and teeth did hang towards me

\(^4\) C. 1810, East Greenland and originally circulated as a broadsheet ballad from King’s Lynn, England. Recorded in A.A. Loyd’s Leviathan! Ballads and Songs of the Whaling Trade. He includes the following note on the record’s sleeve about the “Cruel Ship’s Captain”: “Early in the 19th century a whale skipper was charged in King’s Lynn with the murder of an apprentice. A broadside ballad, in the form of a wordy gallows confession and good night, appeared, and in course of circulating round the East Anglian countryside it got pared down to the bone. The poet George Crabbe was interested in the case, and took it as a model for his verse-narrating of Peter Grimes, which subsequently formed the base of Britten's opera. The opera is in three acts. The same ground is covered in three verses by a song as bleak and keen as a harpoon head.”
With his hands and his feet bowed down likewise,

And with a blood iron bar I killed him

Because I wouldn’t hear his cries.

In a very gruesome way, this shanty reveals both the captain’s abuse of power at sea and the damaging consequences that violent demonstrations of masculinity have on an individual or society. First, the sea shanty points to class differences between the captain and the young sailor. The young sailor, apprenticed to the captain, relies on the captain’s generosity for his financial stability and physical wellbeing. The captain, from a presumably wealthier background, misuses the authority of his station and severely abuses the young sailor, likely because of his working class status and low position in the sea hierarchy. The captain has full authority whereas the sailor has no rights and lacks the ability to defend himself. The shanty is told through the captain’s point of view, which further elucidates the captain’s power and authority, and neither the young sailor nor the crew have a voice in this shanty. The sailors’ silence in the shanty, as there is no chorus or refrain (thus no call and response), emphasizes the captain’s power at sea because of the class dynamics between him and his crew. The lack of a call and response in this shanty further shows that brotherhood or community does not exist between the captain and his crew.

The captain’s first person narration implies that the shanty is about his authority. It is told through his point of view and offers a rationale for his actions. For example, the captain rationalizes his involvement in the boy’s death because the boy is poor, lacks parental concern, and is bound for the workhouse. In recounting and justifying the boy’s murder, the captain demonstrates his authority and the power he wields as captain; yet,
there is also a glimpse of remorse in the shanty: “this poor boy.” The phrase “this poor boy” briefly humanizes the sea captain, but the line is followed with the phrase “did annoy me,” which demonstrates that the captain murdered the young sailor because he was an annoyance. More importantly, the sea shanty depicts the captain’s inappropriate display of masculinity through violence, which is emphasized through the line “And with a bloody iron bar I killed him.” This line signals to the listener and functions as a warning to other seafarers that the captain’s untamed masculinity is dangerous, especially for the next generation of men, which the young sailor represents. The shanty critiques the captain’s abuse of power, his class exploitation, and the danger of violent and forceful demonstrations of masculinity at sea.

I. The Enslaved Sailor

_The Interesting Narrative of Olaudah Equiano_ is an influential slave narrative written to advocate for the Slave Trade Act (1801) and the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade. Importantly, the narrative challenges eighteenth-century notions of race, identity, and decorum. As the narrative unfolds, Equiano progresses from aspiring to be like his white masters to critiquing their behavior. Despite the questions of Equiano’s identity and concerns about the narrative’s authenticity as suggested by Vincent Carretta, I argue that the narrative remains an authentic source of information about African Americans’ experiences at sea as enslaved and free seafarers.⁵ Though Equiano scholars such as Ronald Paul, Emily Donaldson, and Susan Marren discuss the importance of race,
self, and identity in Equiano’s narrative, only a few scholars have examined his narrative through a maritime lens. Like me, Matthew Brown reads Equiano’s narrative as a maritime text, and he argues that “Reading The Narrative as the work of a sailor uncovers the key role sailoring played in freeing Equiano and making him the important abolitionist he became…” (192). While I agree with Brown’s analysis that Equiano’s narrative connects seafaring and slavery, I argue that seafaring informs his identity, how he participates in society, and his performance of masculinity. In my analysis, I contend that the maritime shapes Equiano’s identity and perception of Anglo-American culture as he spends the majority of his life (during and after his enslavement) as a member of the seafaring community. Equiano is introduced to “white civility” on the Middle Passage. He is bought by Michael Pascal, an officer of the Royal Navy, and Equiano serves him at sea during the Seven Years War with France. Equiano is then sold to Robert King, an American trader in the Caribbean, and King allows Equiano to serve as a sailor on one of his merchant ships. As a sailor, Equiano engages in trade and earns his freedom. After his enslavement, Equiano continues to serve as both a valet and sailor at sea as a way to make his living. As such, seafaring shapes the formation of Equiano’s identity: it is his first introduction into white society, it is the means of attaining his freedom, and it

---

6 A sampling of scholars whose work also focuses on race and identity in Equiano’s The Interesting Life include Vincent Carretta’s “Representations of Race, Status, and Slavery in Behn’s Oroonokoo and Equiano’s Interesting Life” (2014), Rebeka Rutledge Fisher “The Poetics of Belong in the Age of Enlightenment: Spiritual Metaphors of Being in Olaudah Equiano’s Interesting Narrative” (2013), and Shawn Regan’s “Learning Not to Curse: Swearing, Testimony, and Truth in Olaudah Equiano’s The interesting Life.” While these scholars also argue that Christianity and race shape Equiano’s identity, I further discuss how seafaring in conjunction with Christianity and race inform Equiano’s identity and the narrative.
provides him with economic stability as a free man. In each stage of the narrative, the sea is the current that threads Equiano’s experiences together.

Equiano begins his critique of white gentility at the very beginning of the narrative when he describes the Middle Passage. It is important that Equiano’s introduction to white society is through the crew, who he is convinced are cannibals because of their foreign looks and their barbaric behavior. Before describing the trauma of the Middle Passage and the abuse he and other Africans endured, Equiano describes the white men who are responsible for his misery.

During the Middle Passage section of the narrative, Equiano first defines the white crew’s barbarity through their appearance and noticeable difference and then describes their actions to show that the brutality of the Middle Passage and the trauma the enslaved Africans endure is because of white men’s failed performances of Christian gentility. For example, Equiano depicts the white crew members as “other” due to their strangeness: “Their complexions too differing so much from ours, their long hair, and the language they spoke, which was very different from any I had ever heard, united to confirm me in this belief” (55). He notes the differences in the complexions between the black and white skin tones. Here Equiano defines the white crew members as different from any individual he has encountered before his time at sea. Equiano challenges the ideology of the binary of skin tones in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that “white” represented “good” and “black” represented “evil.”

The description of the cruelty of the white crew throughout the voyage only confirms Equiano’s initial impression of the white men and dismantles the ideology of race hierarchy. Equiano writes,
I feared I should be put the death, the white people looked and acted, as I thought, in so savage a manner; for I had never seen among any people such instances of brutal cruelty; and this not only shewn to us blacks, but also to some of the white folks themselves. One white man in particular I saw, when we were permitted to be on deck, flogged so unmercifully with a large rope near the foremast, that he died in consequence of it; and they tossed him over the side as they would have done a brute. This made me fear these people the more; and I expected nothing less than to be treated in the same manner. (57)

It is important to note that through the narrative, Equiano refers to himself as the “African,” which to his white readers implies “outsider” or “other.” Equiano uses his position of “other” in Anglo-American society to critique white society. In this description, he highlights the cruelty of the white sailors and labels their actions as inappropriate. As a seafarer, Equiano also reflects on this event to illustrate the brutality of conventional maritime practices. Their behavior is not only inappropriate, but it is reckless, violent, and dangerous. Equiano defines the white crew as heartless and careless men with no respect for human life, regardless of skin tone. He shows his audience, likely white middle-and-upper class readers in Great Britain and the United States, that individuals involved in the Middle Passage do not appropriately practice Christianity and they lack morals and self-control. Equiano uses the white seafarers to not only critique Anglo-American masculinity, but also to demonstrate the cruelty of the white seafarers juxtaposed to the innocence of the Africans. He further condemns the transatlantic slave trade as an heathenistic operation.
Further, Equiano uses his description of the Middle Passage and the brutality the enslaved endure to critique the cruelty and barbarity of the institution of slavery in the United States and Great Britain. Though Africans captured, enslaved, and sold Equiano, the treatment he experiences as a slave in Africa greatly differs from his condition as a slave who endures the Middle Passage. He writes, “I even wished for my former slavery in preference to my present situation, which was filled with horrors of every kind, still heightened by my ignorance of what I was to undergo” (56). Here, Equiano writes to a white audience that their behavior is more barbaric than the “uncultured” Africans they have enslaved. Jason Berger argues that in Anglo-American society, sailors play an important role as bearers of white civility, and Equiano characterizes the sailors as boorish and uncivilized men. If these sailors function as representatives of Anglo-American society, Anglo-American society is also crude and barbarian. In this description, Equiano influences his white readership and asks his white readers to weigh the consequences of their continued support of the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

To further his point, Equiano closes the section on the middle passage with an emotional appeal to his readers, “O, ye nominal Christians! Might not an African ask you, learned you this from your God? Who says unto you, Do unto all men as you would men should do unto you? Is it not enough that we are torn from our country and friends to toil for your luxury and lust of gain?” (61). Equiano challenges white individuals’ practice of Christianity and their morals. He suggests that those who condone the Transatlantic Slave Trade cannot claim to be Christians because they support cruelty and disregard for human life. Equiano, by critiquing white society and whites’ inability to
practice the tenets of Christianity, asks his readers to consider how the actions of white individuals involved in the slave trade represent Anglo-American society and its values.

Though Equiano negatively depicts white men who do not adhere to the tenets of Christianity to demonstrate the flaws in middle-and-upper class Anglo-American performances of masculinity, he also depicts white men who act with refinement and self-control and he does so through the representation of impressed, British, working class sailors. Through these men, Equiano shows how men should properly perform Christian gentility, and he also illustrates how he, as a black man, learns the tenets of Christian gentility from these men. When Equiano describes the Middle Passage as a violent and traumatic experience, he describes the white members of the crew as inhumane and barbaric. Yet, Equiano presents the impressed sailors of the British Navy, who rank among the working classes, as perfect gentlemen who fulfill the tenets of Christian gentility. Unlike the crew members he encountered during the Middle Passage, the British sailors treat him with kindness and welcome him into their seafaring community. The different treatment Equiano receives from the two crews likely has to do with the circumstances of the crewmembers. Sailors who were involved in the transatlantic slave trade willingly signed contracts and likely gained an economic profit from the transport of humans across the sea whereas a number of crewmembers on the British ships in which Equiano served were likely impressed. His positive depiction of the British sailors is also partially a form of class loyalty with the working class men as, at the time Equiano wrote the narrative, he likely viewed himself as a member of the Anglo-American

---

7 Impressment was a form of “time-capped” slavery for members of the working class. In times of war, the British government “forcefully” recruited able-bodied men to serve as sailors.
working class. While Great Britain was involved in the Seven Year Wars’ War, impressment was a common practice. During war time periods, Great Britain’s Royal Navy experienced shortages due to the low pay and lack of qualified seamen, and they implemented the practice of impressment in which unwilling individuals were forced into military servitude.

These men likely befriended Equiano because they saw their situations as similar: both were forced to serve against their will. For example, Equiano describes his friendship with Daniel Queen, a steward, and explains how Queen introduced him to Christianity and informed him about the manners of white civility: “He used to say, that he and I never should part, and that when our ship was paid off, as I was as free as himself or any other man on board, he would instruct me in his business, by which I might gain a good livelihood” (92). Here, Queen assumes that Equiano’s condition is like his and the other crew members. Because Equiano and Queen share in the same circumstances at sea and experience the same hardships, their bond and brotherhood transcends class and color lines. Not only does Queen act with kindness and adhere to the tenets of Christianity by befriending Equiano, he also informs Equiano about white society so that he may more easily assimilate into white culture. Through this relationship, Equiano shows that impressed individuals adhere to the ideals of Christian gentility more than individuals of the middle-and-upper middle classes who claim to act on principles of Christianity. Like his description of the Middle Passage, Equiano’s depiction of the impressed sailors offers a rhetorical critique. He holds a mirror to his white readers and asks them if the tenets of Christianity are reflected in their image.
Equiano places the impressed sailors and their behavior on a pedestal as a model for other members of society to follow. For Equiano, gentility is not defined by wealth or status but by one’s actions and embodiment of faith. The description of his slave masters and sea captains in the United States and the United Kingdom further removes gentility from class as these influential and wealthy men cannot adhere to the tenets of Christianity. Though Equiano is kindly treated by some of his masters and captains, the cruel treatment he receives from the majority of the captains/masters outweighs the kindness he received from others. Yet, Equiano’s unique position as an enslaved seafarer affords him more opportunities than he would have access to if he was enslaved on a plantation. As a slave, Equiano claims that he “received better treatment from him [master] than any other I believe I ever met with in the West-Indies in my situation (116). The sea is the means to obtaining his freedom and his seafaring situation allows him to pursue capitalist opportunities he would otherwise be denied.

After Equiano obtains his freedom, he is not granted admission to white, middle-class society and he endures many injustices because of white Anglo-American men’s failed performances of masculinity. Aboard, as a free sailor, Equiano is still treated poorly by captains. For example, when a captain in port attempts to force Equiano into impressment and he threatens to return Equiano to his enslaved position, Equiano successfully resists impressment despite the captain’s threats that he will enslave him. The captain, in response to Equiano’s defiance, disciplines him, and the captain uses violence to assert his agency and to guarantee Equiano’s submission:

He desired me to go in the schooner, or else I should not go out of the sloop as a free man…I said I had been twice amongst the Turks, yet had
never seen any such usage with them, and much less could I have expect
any thing of this kind among the Christians…without another word, he
made some of his people tie ropes round each of my ancles [sic], and also
to each wrist and another rope around my body, and hoisted me up without
letting my feet touch or rest upon anything. Thus I hung, without any
crime committed, and could not by the law get any redress from a white
person in those parts of the world. (212)

Equiano’s description of the captain’s cruelty draws attention to masculine impropriety
and the captain’s inability to act as a Christian gentleman. Though the crew’s
compliance with the captain’s orders can be read as an act of racism, the captain’s
behavior is also a demonstration of his authority and a power tactic. If the crew
challenged the captain’s orders, they too would likely face a similar punishment or worse.

In the above description, Equiano first elucidates that the captain and his
inappropriate demonstration of authority do not comply with the ideality of the Christian
gentleman. Second, Equiano’s anecdote about the captain’s cruelty functions as a
rhetorical appeal for readers who may view the captain’s behavior as appropriate because
of Equiano’s former position as a slave. But, his comparison of the captain’s “Christian”
behavior with the Turk’s kindness reiterates the barbarity of “white civility” that Equiano
describes at the beginning of the narrative through his discussion of the Middle Passage.
In the eighteenth and nineteenth century, “Turk” carried the connotation of heathen or
barbarian, and Equiano’s comparison between the captain and “Turks” implies that the
“Turks” are more civilized than the captain. Equiano’s inclusion of this experience in his
narrative not only critiques the captain’s behavior but it also critiques white society’s
acceptance of the captain’s behavior. As free men, Equiano and other seafarers are
treated like slaves signaling that the middle-and-upper class men bestow cruelty upon
both the enslaved and working class populations. If this cruelty is heathenistic and
barbaric, as Equiano implies, then any individual who condones this behavior is more
immoral than the “Turks.” Equiano challenges the Christian gentleman and asks for
society to reform in order to reflect this model of gentility.

To further show that those who support and condone slavery or cruelty to the
working classes do not adhere to the ideality of Christian gentility, Equiano – as “the
African” or the “other” according to white society – must demonstrate his assimilation
into white society by practicing the tenets of Christianity. In the demonstration of his
spiritual superiority despite his black identity, Equiano theoretically asks white readers to
evaluate their beliefs, behavior, and reform if necessary. The conclusion of his narrative
is not only a call for further evangelization but it is also a call for white male readers to
reform and act as the Christians they claim to be. For example, near the end of the
narrative, Equiano shares the exchange that occurred between him and the Musquito
king’s son, George, who was recently baptized. George, after his encounters with white
society, questions Equiano about white men and their behavior: “How comes it that all
the white men on board, who can read and write, observe the sun, and know all things,
yet swear, lie, and get drunk, only excepting yourself?” (204). Here, Equiano includes his
conversation with George to critique white Christian gentility. George’s question works
to redefine Anglo-American gentility and shows that it is not based on class, race, or
education but rather an individual’s ability to adhere to the tenets of Christianity.
In this passage, Equiano places himself upon a pedestal as an exemplar of the ideality of Christian gentility because he does not lie, cheat, swear, or drink and he acts with refinement and restraint. In doing so, he demonstrates his ability to assimilate into white society because he correctly performs his masculinity. Equiano’s critique of white masculinity advocates for the end of the transatlantic slave trade and slavery at the same time that he challenges white decorum. His narrative raises an important question: If the “African” is inferior to white society, then why do others, such as George, view Equiano as morally superior? His narrative forces white readers to acknowledge that they are responsible for the evils in society because of their actions; at the same time the narrative demonstrates Equiano’s ability to assimilate into white society because of his appropriate performance of Christian gentility. His narrative ultimately argues that “Africans” are not the barbarians in white society and their enslavement is unjustified.

Although Equiano’s narrative is typically classified as a slave narrative, scholars should reconsider the narrative as a maritime autobiography because of the ways that Equiano’s text connects seafaring and slavery and uses the plight of the sailor and the slave to critique Christian gentility in Anglo-American society. In depicting the cruel treatment that he experiences from his captain/masters as a slave/sailor and the kindness and fraternity he receives from the working class seafaring community, Equiano critiques middle-class performances of masculinity and suggests that their inability to adhere to Christian gentility is harmful to society. His narrative, while advocating for the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade, also redefines gentility as accessible to any class and race if the tenets of Christianity are upheld.
II. The Working Class Sailor

Horace Lane’s *The Wandering Boy* shares many similarities with Equiano’s narrative. Like Equiano, *The Wandering Boy* critiques captain behavior and connects the plight of the sailor with the plight of the slave. Although the two narratives are separated by a span of fifty years, they both appeal to humanitarian sentiments to advocate for reform. Further, both texts suggest that middle class men and their inability to adhere to Christian gentility are responsible for the corruption of society. Unlike Equiano who presents his piety as a model for his readers to follow in an attempt to reform society, Lane acknowledges that he is a misfit in society. Yet, Lane claims that his inability to appropriately perform masculinity and assimilate in society is a result of the ill-use and abuse he received from his sea captains – white, wealthy men who did not adhere to Christian gentility. Because Lane never had a model to emulate, he never learned how to perform his masculinity appropriately and he remains unable to re-assimilate into antebellum New England society after a career at sea.

The narrative, published in 1839, sold roughly 12,000 copies, but after his death, Lane’s narrative, like many working class sailor narratives, remained buried in the past. Cultural historian, Myra C. Glenn, was influential in the recovery and the study of Lane’s narrative. She argues that *The Wandering Boy* is a revealing tale about failure in antebellum America and what happens to the American sailor after his retirement from seafaring. *The Wandering Boy* is a text written by an under-educated member of the working class, and it details the struggles he faces as a member of this class. In my analysis of Lane’s text, I examine *The Wandering Boy* and how it critiques upper class men and their inability to adhere to Christian gentility. The narrative also educates
readers about the consequences of impropriety. Lane’s narrative demonstrates the importance of proper decorum and warns young readers about leading a life that does not adhere to the tenets of Christianity. If, as Glenn argues, *The Wandering Boy* is a narrative about failure, it also reveals the consequences both the individual and society must face when masculinity is improperly performed.

In brief summary, *The Wandering Boy* is Lane’s first-person account about his adventures at sea, his inappropriate behavior, his imprisonment, and his reform. At a young age, Lane ships as a cabin boy and is “raised” at sea. He develops a specialized knowledge of seafaring and is initiated into the seafaring community. Lane performs a rough masculinity and participates in inappropriate behavior such as womanizing and intemperance. Throughout the narrative, he is imprisoned multiple times because of his inappropriate conduct. At the close of the narrative, Lane, penniless, recounts his sins and asserts his reform; he is now a sober, devout Christian and writes his narrative to warn others about the consequences of inappropriate behavior in society. I will open my discussion of Lane’s text with an analysis of his preface as it sets the tone for the narrative and connects his agenda with humanitarian movements, such as the Seamen’s Friend Society. I then examine his life on land, the loss of his mother, and his decision to go to sea. For Lane, seafaring is an adventure and escape from the constraints of society. Next, I move into an analysis of his career as a seafarer and how captains and sailors influence his behavior. Finally, I conclude my examination of Lane’s narrative by analyzing his retirement from a seafaring life and his failure to re-assimilate into antebellum society. In all three sections of the narrative, Lane details the consequences of
failing to perform proper masculinity because he does not have a proper masculine model to emulate during his adolescence and manhood.

In the preface to *The Wandering Boy*, Lane establishes the argument that his narrative is about the dangers of impropriety. Lane introduces the narrative by writing,

The author is induced to offer his work to the public from an impression that it may serve as a beacon or rock or shoal to give warning to his fellow-beings, especially careless youth, that they may duly consider their course, and steer clear of the quicksands [sic] which have caused him so much trouble and distress, and in which he should have sunk had he not been rescued by the Almighty arm” (v).

Here, he emphasizes the importance of proper behavior and places the cause of his hardships on his carelessness and inability to properly perform his masculinity as a Christian gentleman. His narrative educates young readers, warns about the dangers of impropriety, and emphasizes the importance of Christianity. Lane critiques individuals—especially white, wealthy men—who do not emulate Christian behavior. By focusing on his misfortunes and his reform, Lane appeals to his readers to act with compassion and to objectively consider his situation. In writing about the harsh realities he experienced at sea due to his captains’ inabilities to practice Christian gentility, he signals to readers that sea life is not a romantic alternative or escape from U.S. middle-class constraints and expectations.

In the narrative, Lane aims to morally convince young readers that a sailor’s life is not for them by highlighting the debauchery, punishment, imprisonment, intemperance, and the poverty he experiences due to his “inconsideration.” Unlike Equiano who places
himself on a pedestal as the perfect model of masculinity, Lane acknowledges his shortcomings and his failure to appropriately perform masculinity. While acknowledging his own shortcomings, Lane also blames his experiences at sea and how they inform his identity for his inability to properly perform masculinity to meet society’s expectations. By the end of the narrative, Lane demonstrates his reform, and he uses his faith and his masculinity as a way to demonstrate his assimilation into American society. While the narrative critiques his and others’ inability to adhere to Christian gentility, it also emphasizes the importance of it in society.

In the preface, Lane also attempts to connect his narrative, captain cruelty, and the consequences of failed gentility to humanitarian movements such as the Seamen’s Friend Society that advocate for the physical and spiritual welfare of sailors. While Equiano uses his narrative to argue for abolition, Lane’s narrative aligns with multiple humanitarian movements – abolition, intemperance, and prison reform – but most closely resembles the agenda of the American Seamen’s Friend Society, officially established in 1838. Although the American Seamen’s Friend Society was a prominent organization in the nineteenth century and continues to be an active national organization that caters to the welfare of sailors, little scholarship exists about the organization. According to David Hovde, the society was unofficially founded in 1828 and offered financial aid to the wives and orphans of deceased sailors. By 1838, due largely to evangelicals, the scope of the organization shifted to providing for the spiritual and physical welfare of sailors by distributing religious tracts to vessels in port and establishing maritime churches in prominent seaports (46). As the establishment of the organization shows, by 1838, sailor welfare became an important concern in antebellum seaport societies. Although the
reason why society became concerned about sailors in the mid-eighteenth century remains uncertain, I argue that it is likely due to the influx of published maritime narratives, such as *The Wandering Boy*, that describe sailors’ undesirable working and living conditions, low wages, and abuse at the hands of wealthy sea captains.

The interest in sailor welfare could also be tied to the popularity of the temperance movement and prison reform as sailors’ intemperance in port often resulted in their imprisonment. It is also possible that sailor welfare became a heightened national concern because, as Hovde notes, middle-and-upper class society’s interest in the sailor’s plight resulted from the nation’s economic investment in the seafaring industry. Sailors acted as liaisons between the United States and foreign nations; they participated in trade, exploration, and expansion. For example, a famous, fictional, example of antebellum American’s contradictory motives in their concern for sailors is *Moby-Dick*’s Aunt Charity. Aunt Charity demonstrates her “charity” by equipping the *The Pequod* with evangelical tracts and bibles, but she also has an economic interest and investment in the vessel’s voyage. In *The Wandering Boy*, Lane rhetorically aligns his agenda and the critique of American masculinity with the humanitarian interest in sailor welfare. Throughout the narrative, he demonstrates his involvement in trade and the economic importance of seafaring. Yet, by depicting his captains’ improper performance of masculinity, he calls attention to the ill treatment sailors receive at sea. Lane blames sailors’ poor conditions on the inabilities of sea captains and their failure to practice a genteel masculinity at sea.

The opening chapters of *The Wandering Boy* connect Lane’s romanticization of the sea and his desire to escape societal constraints with the death of his mother. As a
child, Lane rejoices at his mother’s death because he views it as an end to his education and lessons in decorum. As an adult and as the narrator, Lane reflects on the loss of his mother and the lack of moral guidance he received in his adolescence because of her death. He writes,

> If I had known or considered that it was not the external condition in which I might be placed, but the part I should act upon which my future happiness or misery, honor or infamy, would depend; now that I was just entering upon the stage of action, how requisite would it have been for me to regulate my plan of conduct with the most serious attention, before I had committed any fatal or irretrievable error. (9)

Lane not only mourns the loss of his mother in this passage, but he also acknowledges the important role that women, especially mothers, play in raising their children. Lane never had an appropriate female model to stress the importance of piety, restraint, or control in his behavior or actions. In describing his mother’s death, Lane attempts to establish pathos with his reader and ask for their sympathy. *The Wandering Boy* demonstrates the importance of maternal guidance in the masculine performance of Christian gentility. Lane, without an appropriate model to instruct him about proper behavior in society and the importance of appropriately displaying his manhood, struggles to be accepted by middle-class U.S. society in his adulthood.

In the opening chapters of *The Wandering Boy*, Lane also emphasize the importance of women’s labor in raising and educating their children, particularly sons. Women’s roles during the nineteenth century were complex, and “Republican Motherhood” validates the importance of women’s roles during this era. Women played
an increasingly important role in shaping American masculinity during the Early Republic. Women instilled in men their values of decorum and piety which established the shared values of the nation and contributed to the idealization of the “Christian Gentleman.” *The Wandering Boy* warns adolescent boys about the dangers of disobeying their mothers. Moreover, for female readers, the narrative illustrates the influence they hold in society as mothers and wives. Throughout his narrative, Lane emphasizes the importance of individuals who can model Christian gentility and women who can stress the importance of it. *The Wandering Boy* appeals to the sympathies of middle-and-upper class female readers to contribute to the sailors’ moral reform as well as their spiritual salvation by supporting societies such as the American Seamen’s Friend Society. In fact, Woman’s Seamen’s Friend Societies were established across New England coastal towns in the nineteenth century for the purpose of aiding the destitute seamen and providing for their temporal and spiritual welfare. Though women are largely absent from Lane’s narrative, they play a significant role in society in enforcing Christian gentility and advocating for humanitarian activism. The death of his mother and Lane’s reflection on his loss elucidates that he is “lost” in society without her direction.

In *The Wandering Boy*, Lane also emphasizes the importance of education as it instills individuals with morals and teaches young men how to appropriately display their masculinity. After the death of his mother, Lane’s father recognizes that he cannot care for his children and thus Lane loses a paternal figure as well as his maternal model. Lane is apprenticed as a store clerk to a country doctor who owns a store. In exchange for Lane’s services, the doctor agrees to provide Lane with a classical education. Yet, during his apprenticeship, there is no one to monitor his moral development and he must learn to
act socially and responsibly through his own trial and error. Shortly after he is apprenticed, Lane runs away and ships as a cabin boy. In running away, Lane breaks the code of Christian gentility. As a boy, Lane rejects nineteenth century decorum and seeks an alternative to the constraints and expectation society places on him as a member of the working class.

Lane soon learns that life at sea is not a utopia, and he must navigate loss, difficult work, his crewmates, and captain personalities. Lane’s first experience at sea is atypical as he fosters a familial bond with his captain, Captain Tyron, who is kind and nurtures him. Captain Tyron attempts to instill in Lane the tenets of Christian gentility:

He was my friend – one of the finest men, as to morals, that ever crossed the ocean, his name was Moses Tyron; his dwelling was in Weathersfield, Connecticut and often when the ship was riding majestically through the waves, he would call to me, to tell me how to behave myself in order to become a moral character, and point out to me in the most pellucid colors that language could exhibit, the fatal consequences of vain habits. (24 – 25)

Here, Captain Tyron functions as a father figure, and offers Lane an appropriate form of masculinity to imitate. He warns Lane of the consequences that will occur if he does not practice self-restraint and control. Lane describes Captain Tyron as “one of the finest men, as to moral, that ever crossed the sea,” and implies that such behavior by sea captains and seafarers is abnormal. Captain Tyron provides Lane with an appropriate model of manhood to emulate, but Lane ultimately rejects this model because he does not want to return to what he sees as an effeminizing and restricting middle-class society.
Throughout his narrative, Lane struggles internally with abiding by the constraints of society, as Captain Tyron represents, or rejecting society and practicing the boisterous masculinity modeled by veteran sailors, who are members of the same class as him. Lane first notes this internal conflict when Captain Tyron offers to adopt him and raise him as his own son: “Captain Tyron endeavored to persuade me to go home with him, and to go to school with his children. I had a sensation of mind telling me it would be best to comply with his invitation, but an opposite stronger desire compelled me to be a sailor, to wander, not contemplating for what” (28). Lane not only rejects Captain Tyron’s offer, but his refusal, in part, is based on the class distinction that separates Tyron and Lane. Lane’s rejection of Tyron’s offer is also a rejection of middle-class values; as a member of the working class, Lane chooses to model his behavior on that of working class seafarers. These seafarers, because they share the same class status as Lane, offer Lane a more realistic model of U.S. manhood to replicate. For Lane, as an “orphan,” the sea is a welcoming alternative as it offers freedom and adventure that are more appealing than the prospects of employment on shore. At this time in his life Lane has yet to experience the hardships of in seafaring, witness the debauchery of sailors, or participate in intemperance or the behavior that labels sailors as “outcasts” in society. As an adolescent, he does not fully understand the consequences of rejecting Captain Tyron’s offer; nor does he understand the importance of middle-class society’s approval in the U.S.

To be initiated into the fraternity of seafarers, Lane must learn to perform his manhood in accordance to the values of his his crewmates. In *The Wandering Boy*, Lane further addresses the internal struggle he faces in accepting the immoral behavior of
sailors and or rejecting their masculinity and thus the only community he knows. He writes,

   My consort perceived my timidity, and began to shame me. ‘What!’ said he. ‘You are going to be a sailor, and afraid to go to a dancing house! Oh, you cowardly puke! Come along…I was a coward, but did not like to be called one; so, to wipe off the stain, I mustered spunk enough to enter…There was some drinking, some swearing, some fighting, some singing… (69-70)

Here, Lane shows that in order to protect his reputation and not to be shunned by his community, he must conform to their demonstrations of manhood. The captain, though he could punish his crew for their behavior in port, does not chastise or attempt to reform his crew’s behavior, which further highlights the lack of moral guidance these men receive. Lane writes further about the behavior of experienced sailors and the influence they have on adolescent seafarers: “They knew the only thing wanting to make a man of me was a guide” (29). Lane’s crewmates recognize that Lane, as a young seafarer, is impressionable and his performance of masculinity is a replication of the manhood performed by his experienced crew members, who fashion their demonstrations of masculinity from their current and former sea captains. Though Lane is responsible for his own actions, Lane suggests that sea captains and the seafaring community are also to blame for his struggle and downfall.

Lane’s second rhetorical move in *The Wandering Boy* addresses captain cruelty and the captain’s inability to adhere to Christian gentility as the reason for the harsh conditions sailors experience at sea. Sea captains occupy an interesting place in society as
they straddle the class lines between the working class and wealthier classes. Society expects captains to adhere to the tenets of Christian gentility as members of the wealthier classes, but they spend the majority of their time at sea with working class sailors. While captains may perform gentility on shore, at sea many captains perform a rougher, more violent manhood, and Lane finds fault with the captain’s behavior at sea. The captain, as sole authority of the vessel, should model appropriate behavior for the wards of his ship. A captain’s cruelty and his inability to model Christian gentility hinders the crew’s social and moral development.

Lane’s critique of the sea captain is the longest and most substantial section of the narrative because he connects his own immoral behavior with the environment of the ship. The geographical location of a vessel and the environment of sea life affects behavior because ships were a world unto themselves once at sea. The captain’s cruelty and his inability to properly model masculinity results in the sailors’ impropriety. For example, shortly after refusing Captain Tyron’s offer to adopt him, Lane ships with a captain, Captain Black, who abuses Lane physically and emotionally. Lane writes,

My situation on the droger [sic] was vastly different from what the captain had represented, he was a hard case – an old drinking sailor, of little learning, and less sense, as regards humanity. He would swear profoundly at anything in human shape; and with horrid imprecations, he would often say to me, “You want to go to school, do you, you d—d Yankee son of a b—h? and so he continued to tantalize me. He gave me many severe floggings, for trifling, frivolous, innocent gestures or omission of duty.

(33)
Here, Lane critiques not only his captain’s performance of masculinity but also his power to mold and influence Lane. His analysis of the captain’s behavior further shows that nineteenth century captains occupied a liminal space in society. Despite the captain’s working class background, as the phrase “old sailor of little learning” implies, he is likely accepted by middle-class society on land because of his wealth and the significant role he plays in supporting the economy of the seaport community. The captain’s behavior shapes Lane’s perspective of U.S. masculinity during his adolescence. For veteran sailors, the captain’s behavior further encourages the performance of rough and robust manhood for fear of being ridiculed by the captain for their piety and restraint. Lane’s commentary suggests that captains, as the sole authority at sea, are responsible for the physical and spiritual wellbeing of their sailors, but they fail to provide sailors with the essentials to meet their worldly and physical needs. As The Wandering Boy demonstrates, when a captain fails to act with gentility at sea, there are severe consequences for sailors, their reputations, and their moral development. The difference between Lane’s two captains provides further commentary on Christian gentility and its importance in the nineteenth century. Whereas The Wandering Boy signals the significance of “Republican Motherhood” through the absence of women in the narrative and his lack of moral guidance. Lane also shows that men play a vital role as moral influencers. Lane’s narrative thus suggests that men and women share the responsibility of ethical guidance and modeling appropriate performances of masculinity or femininity for the next generation of society.

The captain’s inappropriate performance of manhood and the abuse of his power is a recurring theme in The Wandering Boy. Lane equates the ill-treatment and neglect he
receives from captains at sea (due to their inability to act with piety, restraint, and control of their passions) to slavery. Lane describes the majority of his sea captains as slave drivers to further demonstrate the inappropriate behavior of sea captains, highlight the plight of the white sailor, invoke sympathy from his middle-and-upper class readers, and blame wealthy and powerful individuals as the cause of evil in society. For example, when Lane is punished and flogged for no reason, he reflects on the event and writes, “I asked him how I became a slave? But it availed me nothing; he was a rich man, a ship owner…” (166). This passage shows that sailors have no authority because of class hierarchy at sea. The captain, despite his unethical behavior, remains unchallenged, while sailors, such as Lane, are punished and excluded from middle class society as “others.” Lane, like Equiano, challenges wealthy individual’s performance and practice of Christian gentility. Members of the working class are supposed to aspire to middle-and-upper class demonstrations of masculinity and are chastised by society when they fail to perform appropriately, whereas wealthy men, who should model gentility, fail to abide by the tenets of Christianity and receive little, if any, criticism from society for their behavior. Lane’s narrative calls attention to the power dichotomy and shows that men who are in positions of power and wealth need to practice a refined and evangelical masculinity because these men not only model behavior for society but also have the means to control society.

As Lane moves to conclude his narrative, he emphasizes the importance of reform and the practice of Christian gentility in antebellum society. He acknowledges that his poor decisions and improper conduct and the consequence of such (his intemperance and multiple imprisonments) could have been avoided if his sea captains modeled their virtue
appropriately and encouraged their crews to act with grace and dignity. In this section of the *The Wandering Boy*, Lane recognizes that the hardships he endured, such as imprisonment and poverty, result from his failure to adhere to the tenets of Christianity. The consequence of such is that his intemperance, womanizing, and rowdy behavior result in his imprisonment and he is further labeled an “outcast” by society.

Unsurprisingly, Lane’s immoral behavior as a sailor results in his inability to re-assimilate into society after a seafaring career. Lane further demonstrates that his seafaring career and the values of the seafaring community do not easily translate into employment or acceptance by shore society. Lane writes that his intemperance and financial desperation led him to robbery:

> While staggering along one night, I fell in with a small wollen [sic] factory; as there was no person to oppose me, or prove their property, and I was in want of clothes, I took a few rolls of satient [sic];[^8] but I was so much by the head that I could not carry sail; I was taken. The effects of the rum emboldened me to do the act; the effects of the same was the means of my getting apprehended. The effects of my long inconsiderate and dissipated habits, were now commencing a more thorough operation that I had previously experience. (190)

In this passage, Lane recognizes the hardships that he experiences in antebellum society because of his intemperance and rough behavior. He uses the consequences of his intemperance to warn readers about his inability to control his passions, and he links the

[^8]: Satient is a material or form of cloth.
temperance movement with the tenets of Christian gentility to appeal to readers to sympathize with the seafarer’s plight.

Lane recognizes the importance of properly performing masculinity to meet the expectations of his readers and that middle-class approval of his character is essential to his financial stability after a seafaring career. By the end of the narrative, Lane demonstrates his reform, his conversion to Christianity, his piety, and his appropriate display of Christian gentility:

For the last five years I have, for instruction and information, been a strict observer of practices, both civil and ecclesiastical, nationally, collectively, and individually; and my conclusion is, that men are ignorant, selfish, and imperfectly to be trusted, since the fall of man…Every man must receive the law at the mouth of Christ, and give personally an account of himself to his Creator. (209)

This passage, at the end of the narrative emphasize the importance of adhering to the tenets of Christian gentility. First, it demonstrates Lane’s acceptance of Christianity and it shows that he is capable of reform and assimilating into as a member of U.S. society. He emphasizes that he is now a “strict observer of practices” “ecclesiastically, nationally, collectively, and individually.” These four words demonstrate that Lane, despite his previous actions, accepts the values of the nation. One must act according to the tenets of the Church, the nation, and the expectations of society. This list of adverbs depicts the various versions of Lane’s selfhood that he gave up during his seafaring career. Here, he unifies Christianity, the nation, and citizenship as important components of his identity as a U.S. citizen. Second, this passage criticizes middle-and-upper class men for their
inability to adhere to this ideology. In the sentence, “my conclusion is, that men are ignorant, selfish, and imperfectly to be trusted since the fall of man” (209), Lane passes judgment on all men, stating that sin and failure is a part of human nature. Lane reiterates that all men are outcasts because of their failure to follow Christ and the model of masculinity Christ emulates. The passage works to align Lane’s morals with his readers’ morals to gain their humanitarian sympathy, and it also asks readers to reflect on their own actions and behavior.

In calling for humanitarian activism by connecting the plight of sailors to other popular humanitarian movements such as abolition, temperance, and prison reform, Lane demonstrates the importance of abiding by the tenets of Christian gentility. Lane suggests that an appropriate model of behavior as well as spiritual and monetary support would relieve the hardships sailors experience. For example, if the conditions of seafaring were eliminated, such as captain’s cruelty as a result of their sole authority, sailors would not practice a hardened, violent masculinity. In fact, *The Wandering Boy* argues that many of the evils in society could be remedied if wealthy and powerful American men would control their passions and act with self-restraint.

III. Stowe’s Legree

*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* shares the agendas of Equiano’s narrative and *The Wandering Boy* in its critique of middle-and-upper class white men’s failure to uphold Christian gentility. Scholars such as Cynthia Wolfe have argued that Tom functions as a “Christ-like” character in the novel, but few scholars have analyzed its different models of masculinity and Stowe’s critique of them, and no scholar has yet examined Simon Legree, Tom’s cruelest master, through the lens of his dual identity as seafarer and slave
master. My analysis of Stowe’s critique of Christian gentility examines the behavior of Tom’s three masters: Master Shelby, Augustine St. Clare, and Simon Legree. As I will demonstrate, these three powerful and wealthy men fail to adhere to the tenets of Christianity. Tom’s physical condition worsens as he is sold further South, and Stowe – like Equiano and Lane – links the evils in society, such as slavery, with antebellum white elite men’s failure to appropriately perform masculinity.

Jane Tompkins’ groundbreaking *Sensational Designs* challenges assumptions about the significance of women’s sentimental writing and the work it performs in society. Tompkins is influential in arguing against the critical, prevailing opinion that Stowe’s novel is an unsophisticated attempt to write meaningfully about the institution of slavery. Like Tompkins, I argue that Stowe, as a middle-class woman, the wife of a preacher, and a mother, writes from a unique perspective. Not only does she write through the lens of a “Republican Mother,” but as Dawn Coleman and Tompkins argue, she also writes with the authority of a preacher or a politician. Her novel, while about the evils of the institution of slavery, also morally instructs, evangelizes, and elicits a response from her readers to change their behavior and amend society. Stowe’s novel elucidates the powerful role women play in society, and I argue that the success of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is largely due to Stowe’s negotiation of her role as wife, mother, and humanitarian activist in society. In the novel, Stowe uses sentimentalism not only to

---

9 Tompkins’ *Sensational Designs* argues that sentimental novels, such as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, are a “political enterprise, halfway between sermon and social theory, that both codifies and attempts to mold the values of its time” (126). Though I am indebted to Tompkins’ assertion that sentimental literature is a form of social criticism, other scholars writing on reform through sentimentalism in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* include Susan M. Ryan, Christopher Diller, and Deborah Rosenthal.
appeal to her readers’ emotions, but also to educate them about appropriate performances of masculinity and femininity. In writing the novel, Stowe successfully performs Republican Motherhood and instructs her middle-class readers about the consequences of failing to perform appropriate decorum. The novel’s success in the nineteenth century and its impact on the abolitionist cause is due to Stowe’s critique of the Christian gentleman in Southern society.

In *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Stowe critiques the behavior of white men because of their inability to practice self-control, restraint, and self-denial. Mr. Shelby and St. Clare are refined members of the planter class, but as Stowe shows, their main flaw is their inability to practice self-denial. Stowe emphasizes that “genteel” men, like Shelby and St. Clare contribute to the evils in society because they do not govern their actions or the actions of others. Though they are not responsible for the hardships Tom experiences at Legree’s plantation, their lack of control and selfishness propels Tom’s downfall. Both men are portrayed as benevolent, well-intentioned slave owners who do not willfully wish to harm Tom. Stowe’s critique of elite, slaveholding men culminates in her characterization of Legree. Legree depicts the importance of civility in elite society and the dangerous consequences of men’s inability to adhere to decorum. Through these three men, Stowe shows that the inability to uphold the tenets of Christianity is the most concerning problem in U.S. society. Legree’s brutal conduct and animalistic characteristics elucidate the importance of men’s proper performance of manhood in the U.S.

In order to situate my analysis of Stowe’s representation of Legree in the context of her other depictions of white masculinity, I will briefly turn away from maritime forms
of masculinity to discuss other prominent white, male characters in Stowe’s novel. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* opens with a critique of gentlemanly appearance through the juxtaposition of Haley and Mr. Shelby’. Stowe describes Haley’s outward appearance as a reflection of his flawed character:

For convenience sake, we have said two gentlemen. One of the parties, however, when critically examined, did not seem, strictly speaking, to come under the species. He was a short, thickset man, with coarse, commonplace features, and that swaggering air of pretension which marks a low man who is trying to elbow his way upward in the world. He was much over-dressed, in a gaudy vest of many colors, a blue neckerchief, bedropped gayly with yellow spots, and arranged with a flaunting tie, quite in keeping with the central air of the man. His hands, large and coarse, were plentifully bedecked with rings; and he wore a heavy gold watch-chain with a bundle of seals of portentous size, and a great variety of colors attached to it – which, in the ardor of conversation, he was in the habit of flourishing and jingling with evident satisfaction… [his language] was garnished at convenient intervals with various profane expressions, which not even the desire to be graphic in our account shall induce us to describe. (1)

Haley’s description is worth noting at length because Stowe critiques his appearance, behavior, beliefs, and language. From the beginning of the novel, Stowe emphasizes the importance of gentlemanly identity and shows how men like Haley cannot be classified as genteel because they do not practice self-control or self-restraint. Through his
appearance, Haley hopes to show other members of society that he is wealthy and has assimilated into upper-middle class society, yet his excessiveness demonstrates his imprudence to Stowe’s reader. Stowe’s phrasing and word choice of “gaudy,” “gayly,” and “flaunting” further suggests that Haley is not a refined member of society. Instead, in her description, he resembles an eighteenth century fop who aspires to a social station higher than the one he holds. The flamboyant movement of Haley’s gold watch-chain while in conversation signals not only Haley’s desire for wealth, but also his desire that other members of society recognize and acknowledge his wealth. Further, Haley’s inability to control his language demonstrates his original class background and his inability to behave like a gentleman despite his appearance of wealth. His inability to control his language represents his lack of self-control and the absence of refined manners in his character. Haley is also incapable of repressing his sexuality as he expresses with astonishment, “There’s an article now!” (4) when Eliza first enters the scene. Stowe stresses Haley’s gaudy appearance and inappropriate behavior to highlight the negative qualities of his identity as a slave trader. She shows that men like Haley, despite their wealth, do not fit into her vision of appropriate antebellum masculine identity.

In comparison to Haley, Stowe defines Mr. Shelby as “having the appearance of a gentleman” (1). Yet, the word choice “appearance” suggests that despite Mr. Shelby’s wealth and refined manners, he like, Haley, because of his involvement in the institution of slavery, does not adhere to the tenets of Christian gentility. At first, Mr. Shelby appears to be a benevolent slave owner who fosters familial bonds with his slaves and reinforces the plantation myth that slavery is a benign institution. While Master Shelby
seems to appropriately perform his masculinity, his association with Haley suggests that he also possesses character flaws. Unlike Haley, Mr. Shelby acts with refinement and control of his passions. Yet, similar to Haley, Master Shelby lacks self-denial, which Stowe criticizes as harmful to society.

For instance, Master Shelby sells Tom and Harry, despite their loyalty, because of a poor business decision that has negatively affected his finances. Mrs. Shelby, despite her best efforts, fails to persuade her husband that selling these faithful servants and separating them from their families is a horrendous act. She asks her husband, “Why not make a pecuniary sacrifice? I’m willing to bear my part of the inconvenience – O, Mr. Shelby, I have tried – tried most faithfully, as a Christian woman should – to do my duty to these poor, simple, dependent creatures” (30). Here, Mrs. Shelby critiques her husband’s decision to sell Tom and Harry and she suggests that there is an alternative solution to their financial hardships. By stating that she is a Christian woman who cares for her slaves, she implies that her husband does not act as a Christian Gentleman would in this situation. Tom and Harry are sold because of Mr. Shelby’s inability to bear any inconvenience or take responsibility for his own failed business venture. Mr. Shelby fails in his performance of Christian gentility, and for Stowe, this is the reason for the slave’s plight and the stain of slavery on the nation.

Like Shelby, Tom’s second master, St. Clare, is portrayed as a benevolent slave master and a caring father, but he is also characterized as an individual who cannot control his passions and lacks evangelical faith. Stowe describes St. Claire’s life as lacking substance and meaning: “There is a most busy and important round of eating, drinking, dressing, walking, visiting, buying, selling, talking, reading, and all that makes
up what is commonly called living, yet to be gone through; and this remained to
Augustine” (140). St. Clare’s life lacks labor, duty, and responsibility. He is idle and
uninvolved in politics, religion, or business. Stowe suggests that St. Clare’s indifference
to these important matters and apathy to the world around him is inappropriate for an
individual of his wealth and class standing. Through St. Clare, Stowe shows the negative
effect the institution of slavery has on individuals’ characters. Their failure to act as
Christians demonstrates how the institution of slavery is harmful to both slaves and their
masters. St. Clare fails to uphold the tenets of Christian gentility because he is morally
corrupted by the institution. Though he agrees to free Tom, he acts with no urgency and
Tom is left unprotected. St. Clare’s lack of control and self-restraint are harmful to those
around him as demonstrated by Tom’s situation after St. Clare’s death. St. Clare’s
untimely death further shows the dangers of his inability to uphold the tenets of
Christianity. Though his death propels the plot of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, his death also
shows that there is no place for men like him in Stowe’s ideal American society.

After St. Clare’s death, readers of Uncle Tom’s Cabin are not surprised to learn
that Marie St. Clare sells Tom “down river” and he is bought by Simon Legree, a cruel,
Southern master who is a Northerner by birth and a seafarer by former trade. Stowe
reserves her harshest commentary on the institution of slavery and her harshest criticism
of masculine performance for her description of Legree. Through Legree’s character, his
seafaring identity, and his position as a cruel master, Stowe makes the argument that
neither men like Legree nor the institution of slavery belong on American soil.

Despite Uncle Tom’s Cabin’s canonical status, Tom’s antagonist remains largely
ignored by scholars. Perhaps because Legree plays a minor role that is wedged between
the interweaving plotlines of Eliza’s cross-dressing and escape to Canada, Tom’s spiritual strength and physical plight, and Cassy and Emmeline’s reunion with family in the North, his character has not garnered scholarly interest. He is, after all, the villain who readers and scholars love to hate in the novel. Yet, through his character, Stowe provides a cultural critique of U.S. society and masculinity. Stowe links Shelby and Augustine St. Clare with Legree (as they are all members of the slaveholding class) and demonstrates how their reputation as wealthy and refined slave holders is tarnished by their acceptance of Legree’s behavior. Thus, through Legree, Stowe argues that all slave masters are cruel and hard men despite their best intentions. As representatives of the U.S. institution of slavery, Shelby, St. Clare, and Legree’s flawed characters show that the institution of slavery and Southern society are damaged.

Though many readers miss or skim through Legree’s backstory in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Stowe describes Legree’s character and his decision to become a sailor. At a young age, Legree flees to the sea and rejects his mother’s governance and follows in his father’s footsteps:

> Born of hard-tempered sire, on whom that gentle woman had wasted a world of unvalued love, Legree had followed in the steps of his father. Boisterous, unruly, and tyrannical, he despised all her counsel, and would none of her reproof; and, at an early age, broke from her, to seek his fortunes at sea. (339)

This often overlooked passage in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* defines Legree as a seafarer, and shows that he chose to reject female governance, and took to the sea, like his father, where he could practice a rougher form of masculinity. Legree rejects his mother’s
council, and instead models his behavior on his father’s actions. In these two simple and often overlooked sentences, Stowe critiques men’s inability to appropriately perform and model their manhood for the next generation of citizens in the United States. This brief description also foreshadows events that will occur as the narrative progresses. As The Wandering Boy shows, Legree’s rejection of his mother also signals the rejection of the tenets of Christianity. The harsh conditions of a seafaring life and the expectation that Legree performs a hard masculinity at sea coupled with his rejection of middle-class U.S. values signals to the reader that Legree, as a seafarer and a slave master, cannot and does uphold the tenets of Christianity.

Though Stowe does not provide any details about Legree’s seafaring career (such as whether he served on a merchant ship or in the whale-fishery) or his rank, we can assume that he shipped as a common jack tar. Although Equiano and Lane position most of their captains in their narratives as cruel, heartless men, nineteenth century individuals such as Stowe, who lacked an “insider’s” perspective on seafaring, would have viewed captains as refined and respectable individuals of society. Stowe’s choice to cast Legree as a captain would have been an inappropriate decision because of how heavily she relies on the reputation of sailors as cruel, hard men in portraying Legree’s character. Legree’s seafaring identity is an important component of Stowe’s argument about inappropriate masculinity. For example, she writers further about Legree’s character:

Hard and reprobate as the godless man seemed now, there had been a time when he had rocked on the bosom of his mother…Far in New England that mother had trained her son with long, unwearied low, and patient prayers…Boisterous, unruly, and tyrannical, he despised her counsel, and
would none of her reproof, and at an early age, broke from her to seek his
fortune at the sea…but sin got the victory, and he set all the force of his
rough nature against his conscience. He drank and swore – was more
wilder than ever. (339)

Stowe uses Legree’s rough masculinity to show her readers that the sea and the plantation
are the only places in American society where this robust demonstration of manhood is
unchallenged by society. Legree’s decision to seek a seafaring career demonstrates his
desire to escape an increasingly feminized and constraining society. The phrase “broke
from her” implies that his mother is responsible for governing society and imposing
constraints on his character. The sea, at least for Legree, provides a welcome alternative
from the demands of decorum. The fact that Legree settles in the South shows that slave
holders also practice an inappropriate masculinity.

To further strengthen the connection between Legree’s inappropriate performance
of masculinity as a former seafarer and the institution of slavery, Stowe suggests the
similarities between the plantation and a ship at sea and highlights the spatial geography
of the house and ship, the isolation of the ship/plantation from society, and the class
hierarchy that the southern plantation and the ship at sea share. For example, she notes
the plantation verandah and describes it as a place where, Legree as master, can oversee
his slaves. At sea, the deck was a space where the captain observed and governed his
crew. Stowe writes, “The house had been large and handsome. It was built in a manner
common in the South; a wider verandah and two stories running around every part of the
house; into which every door opened, the lower tier being supported by brick pillars”
(314). The two story verandah wraps around the house and allows Legree to oversee
every aspect of the plantation from his porch. In this aspect, the verandah is similar to a
deck at sea and the captain’s view from it. At sea, a vessel’s deck would likely be
composed of multiple layers and components: the hull, the afterdeck, and the bridge
deck.\(^\text{10}\) As a captain would stand watch on the bridge deck, Legree stands watch over his
slaves on the upper-story of the verandah.

The similarities between the verandah and the bridge deck also highlight the
isolation of the ship and the plantation. At sea, as Raffety notes, the ship was separated
from the rest of the world: “each ship, once it left port, was a world unto itself” (24).
Stowe emphasizes the distance of plantations from other governing components of
society. The plantation, like a ship at sea, is described as an island and distanced from the
governing eye of others: As a result, the master has sole authority, and like a sea captain,
he is “king” of his domain. Through Cassy’s dialogue, Stowe describes a master’s
complete control over his slaves on a plantation: “Here you are, on a lone plantation, ten
miles from any other, in the swamps; not a white person here, who could testify, if they
burned you alive, - if you were scalded, cut into inch-pieces, set up for the dogs to tear, or
hung up and whipped to death. There’s no law here, of God or man…” (327). Through
Cassy’s dialogue, Stowe shows that there are parallels between the treatment of sailors
and enslaved individuals. Though sailors willingly entered into a time-capped form of
slavery by signing their contracts, they lacked the ability to protest captain injustices. The
enslaved, on the other hand, were born or forced into their servitude. Despite the
differences in their circumstances, both, the enslaved and sailors lacked the ability to

\(^{10}\) The hull was the flooring of the deck, the afterdeck was the deck open towards the
stern-aft, and the bridge deck was the area including the helm and navigation station and
where the officer of the deck/watch was located.
legally challenge their captain/masters’ treatment, and they were reliant on the generosity of other white middle-and-upper class individuals to recognize their master’s extreme cruelty. The ship and the plantation’s distance from public view allows Legree to exercise unchecked power and authority. In casting Legree as a seafarer and a slaveholder, Stowe suggests that this unchecked power is harmful to American masculinity and American southern society.

Stowe further demonstrates the plantation as forlorn and decaying, which signals to the reader Legree’s negligence as a slave owner, a Christian, and an American citizen: “The place had a ragged, forlorn appearance, which is always produced by the evidence that the care of the former owner had been left to utter decay” (314). Here, the once cared for plantation is decrepit under Legree’s ownership, signaling to the reader that the institution of slavery is an obsolete institution that debilitates society. Legree does not care for the appearance of his property; therefore, one can assume he does not care about the physical or spiritual wellbeing of his slaves. From the physical description of the plantation, the reader gathers that Legree lacks self-restraint and control. If he lacks these qualities of “Christian gentility,” then his character dismantles the argument made by defenders of slavery, such as John C. Calhoun, that slavery is a benign institution that evangelizes heathens.11 Legree’s character and the state of his plantation show that slavery cripples society: white men who own slaves fail to adhere to the tenets of Christianity and they cannot and do not provide their slaves with spiritual or physical

11 Calhoun wrote, an advocate of the institution of slavery, wrote, “never before has the black race of Central Africa, from the dawn to the present day, attained a condition so civilized and so improved, not only physically but, morally and intellectually.”
guidance. Stowe emphasizes the harm that the institution does to white, elite men, not just enslaved individuals.

In fact, the description of Legree’s own appearance mirrors the description of the plantation. Through the physical description of Legree and his plantation, the reader can also assume that Legree does not nourish his own spirituality and the outward appearance is a reflection of his tarnished masculinity. Like the plantation, Legree is portrayed as worn, ragged, and dirty. Stowe writes,

> From the moment that Tom saw him approaching, he felt an immediate and revolting horror at him, that increased as he came near. He was evidently, though short, of gigantic strength. His round, bullet head, tight-gray eyes, with their shaggy, sandy eye-brows, and stiff, wiry, sun-burned hair, were rather unprepossessing items, it is to be confessed; his large, coarse mouth was distended with tobacco juice, of which, from time to time, he ejected from his large mouth with great decision and explosive force, his hands were immensely large, hairy, sunburned, freckled, and very garnished with long nails, in a very foul condition. (306)

The description of Legree recalls Stowe’s description of Haley at the beginning of the novel when Stowe first defines appropriate masculinity through one’s appearance and actions. Legree’s unkempt appearance also demonstrates that he lacks refinement. The description of Legree’s features confirm his identity as a cruel, unpolished man with tarnished morals. Legree’s neglect of his own character and plantation works to emphasize the neglect and cruelty in the treatment of his slaves. As another example,
when Legree is at the slave auction, he explains to a stranger, within Tom’s earshot, how he treats his slaves and his justification for it:

‘…when I fust began, have considerable trouble fussin’ with ‘em and trying to make ‘em hold out,…Law, t’ wasn’t no sort o’ use; I lose money on ‘em, and ‘t was heaps o’ trouble. Now, you see, I just put ‘em straight through, sick or well. When one nigger’s dead, I buy another; and I find it comes cheaper and easier, every way.’ (310)

Stowe uses Legree’s character to show the true cruelty in the institution of slavery and its damaging effects to American masculinity. His identity as a slaveholder coupled with his former seafaring career signals to an antebellum audience that slave owner’s performance of masculinity should be critiqued just as harshly as the sailors’ inappropriate demonstrations of manhood.

The plantation and the legal relationship between the master and the slave create an environment where Legree can continue to practice his “rough masculinity” of the seafaring community on shore without facing criticism from antebellum society. Whereas Lane and many other sailors faced financial difficulties after a seafaring career and were unable to assimilate into antebellum society because of their behavior, Legree does not need to accept a genteel identity in the South as a slave owner. By linking Legree’s seafaring identity with his slave master identity, Stowe suggests that if Americans critique seafarers’ demonstrations of masculinity, they must also do the same for slaveholders as both settings foster an environment where rough masculinity goes unchallenged.
Stowe further elucidates the dangers of improper demonstrations of manhood through Legree’s intemperance in his use of alcohol. In highlighting his intemperance, Stowe links the abolition movement with the temperance movement to emphasize the dangers of both to society and an individual’s character. Through Legree, she demonstrates that slavery and drinking corrupt society:

It was between one and two o’clock at night, as Cassy was returning from her ministration to poor Tom, that she heard the sound of wild, shrieking, whooping, hallooing, and singing, from the sitting room, mingled with the barking of dogs and other symptoms of general uproar. She came up the verandah steps, and looking in found Legree and both the drivers, in a state of furious intoxication, were signing, whooping, upsetting chairs, and making all manner of ludicrous and horrid grimaces at each other. (341)

In this passage, Stowe emphasizes both the wildness of Legree’s behavior and his lack of control due to intoxication. Stowe’s diction of “shrieking, whooping, hallooing,” communicates to the reader that these intoxicated men not only lack control and reason, but they behave no better than beasts, heathens, and uncivilized men. Legree’s “hallooing” and “whooping” mirrors the behavior of fictional frontier’s men, such as Thomas Bang Thorpe’s Jim Dogget,12 whose rough masculinity is only appropriate because he paves the way for civilization and moves further west as civilization and the regulations of middle-class society encroach upon his territory. Here, Legree’s behavior is inappropriate because he is not a fictional representation of the “fleeting frontiersman,” but rather a permanent fixture in southern society. Stowe also condemns Legree’s

12 Thomas Bang Thorpe’s “Big Bear of Arkansas” (1841)
intoxication because of how it negatively affects his slaves, Quimbo and Sambo, the drivers briefly mentioned in the passage. Quimbo and Sambo, to gain favor with their master, emulate his behavior, whereas it should be Legree’s responsibility to instill in these men the tenets of Christian gentility: self-restraint, control, and. Instead, his behavior and his treatment of Quimbo and Sambo reflect the power dynamics of the captain’s authority at sea. Through Legree’s intoxication, Stowe shows that man’s inability to practice Christian gentility is responsible for society’s moral decline.

If in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Stowe provides inappropriate models of masculine identities and critiques manhood, does she provide a model for readers to emulate? Scholars, such as Wolfe, argue that Tom is the idealization of a “Christ-like figure” in the novel, and his death places pressure on men to reform their behavior. While Tom’s piety and perfect demonstrations of Christian manhood do force white nineteenth century readers to question their own performances of decorum, Tom is not the model Stowe hopes her readers will emulate. Tom’s unwavering Christian faith and his selfish actions humanize him, but his death at the end of the novel only shows the dangers of ungoverned masculinity and its harmful effects. Instead, Stowe demonstrates proper masculinity through George Shelby, Master Shelby’s son, who represents the idealization of Christian gentility by attempting to rescue Tom at the end of the novel. George, as the second generation of men in the novel, symbolizes the duty and responsibility of the next generation of U.S. citizens to make amends for the sins of their fathers. In the end, Stowe makes an argument for abolition through Christian gentility and shows through Legree’s seafaring identity how failure to adhere to the tenets of Christianity damages all aspects of American character, institutions, and identity. Further, she uses Legree’s character as a
seafarer, “an outsider,” and his position as a slave owner to show that the institution of slavery should be condemned along with the sailors, such as Lane, who cannot assimilate into American.

Unlike Lane or Equiano, Legree – as a caricature of a seafarer – does not attempt to reform his behavior after a seafaring career. He does not recognize the importance of Christian gentility, and his behavior does not align with antebellum values. Instead, Legree continues to practice a rough and violent masculinity that is dangerous to society. In the “deep” South, other members of society do not reproach Legree for his behavior. Stowe uses Legree’s questionable and immoral behavior to demonstrate the weight of Christian gentility. His position within antebellum slaveholding society shows the danger of improper performances of masculinity to U.S. society.

Paired together, The Interesting Life, The Wandering Boy, and Uncle Tom’s Cabin critique the performance of U.S. manhood in the nineteenth century. Equiano, Lane, and Stowe show that wealthy, white men hold powerful and influential positions in society. Though other members of society, such as sailors, are expected to adhere to the tenets of Christianity, these individuals’, such as sea captains or slave masters, inappropriate performances of masculinity are unchallenged by society. Through their narratives, Equiano, Lane, and Stowe demonstrate the importance of practicing Christian gentility and the harm inappropriate masculinity causes to individuals and society. These texts lay the foundation for an analysis of Christianity Gentility and the ideology of separate spheres as the next chapter examines the accounts of nineteenth century women who pass as sailors and their negotiation of their female virtues and masculine performances. As chapter two will go on to suggest, these women model Christian gentility and U.S.
citizenship through the mediation of their roles as seafarers, their identity of women, and
the expectations that antebellum society places on them.
Chapter 2

The Female Sailor: The Perfect Woman

In Chapter One, I argued that Equiano Olaudah’s *The Interesting Life*, Horace Lane’s *The Wandering Boy*, and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* use traditional seafarer identities and the maritime to critique inappropriate demonstrations of masculinity, encourage reform of behavior to remedy the corruption of society, and advocate for humanitarian activism. In Chapter Two, I analyze the phenomenon of eighteenth and nineteenth century women passing as sailors and the important roles these women play as seafarers. Through analysis of Catharine Sedgwick’s “The Chivalrous Sailor” and Emma Cole’s *The Life and Sufferings of Miss Emma Cole: Being a Faithful Narrative of Her Life*, I argue that women who pass as seafarers occupy a liminal space in society. In passing as men, these women must appropriately perform their masculinity to meet the expectations of their marine community and the standards of society at the same time that they must demonstrate to their readers that they correctly adhered to the ideal tenets of womanhood during their passing. Passing narratives, such as Sedgwick’s and Cole’s further develop the critique of rough masculinity by demonstrating the female sailor’s ability to successfully perform as men while retaining their feminine virtues of purity and piety. Their qualities of modesty and virtue thus inform the performance of their manhood. Through the successful performances of masculinity and femininity in their passing, these women model American citizenship for both men and women.

Before I begin an in-depth analysis of Sedgwick and Cole’s texts, I open this chapter with a brief background on the phenomenon of gender passing in the eighteenth
and nineteenth centuries and explain how women convincingly passed as male sailors. Next, I provide a brief summary of Henry Richard Dana Jr.’s *Two Years Before the Mast*. His narrative offers a study of maritime class passing (or failed passing), and his failure to appropriately pass as a working class sailor further highlights the extraordinary negotiation of identities that women achieved in successfully passing as sailors at sea. I also briefly explain the importance of fictional female sailors in James Fenimore Cooper’s sea novels, such as *The Pilot*, to illustrate society’s awareness of women sailors and the important role they played in society. Cooper’s novels demonstrate a recognition that women offered a model of behavior for both genders, but these characters also show women’s ability to contribute to establishing nationhood in the Early Republic in a capacity that extends beyond the traditional duties of “Republican Motherhood.” In my analysis of Sedgwick and Cole’s texts, I argue that the successful passing of women seafarers provides a model of masculinity and femininity for the nation to replicate.

I. Women Sailors

Women passing as sailors was a popular trope in society during the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. In ballads, sea shanties, biographical accounts, and fiction, a woman passing as a sailor is typically glorified as a “heroine” and rewarded for her acts of bravery, courage and strength. Often such accounts of women passing as sailors follow a similar trajectory: the woman escapes to the sea in a disguise to follow a loved one, to escape a situation on land, or because of financial necessity. These accounts also praise the woman for acting with bravery and defending the nation in times of war or against piracy. Even when their true identities are threatened by punishment or injury, these women never expose their feminine identities to escape punishment or seek protection.
Only after a voyage is complete, would a passing sailor reveal her true nature to her crewmates, and, in both fictional and biographical accounts, her crewmates praise and celebrate her disguise. Though seafaring women were often praised after their successful passing, the decision to pass was fraught with anxiety. Passing as a sailor was a fundamentally daring and risky thing to do, and her discovery could result in dire consequences. Few biographical accounts of failed women’s failed attempts to pass as seafarers exist, likely because of their working class backgrounds, but one can imagine the exclusion she received from the crew and the moral rejection she endured from society upon her return to shore. After the female sailor reveals her disguise in successful passing narratives, it is not uncommon for her account to end in marriage to the captain or a member of the crew. In both fictional and biographical accounts, the happy couple either retire to a domestic life or they return to their career at sea, where she continues to pass as a sailor alongside her husband.

Women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries passed as sailors for a number of reasons that included the desire for financial stability, escape from a patriarchal or oppressive society, romance, and adventure. Women who successfully passed as sailors undoubtedly succeeded because of their ability to perform physical labor, their appearance, and their understanding of social and gender codes. Most woman seafarers, although not all, were from a working class background, and, as David Cordingly notes, were well suited for sea life because they were accustomed to difficult situations:

…most working class women in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were accustomed to a hard life that involved long hours and a great deal of physical labor, so that provided the female sailor was reasonably strong
and fit, she would not have found most of the demands of the sailors’ work beyond her. (62)

Working class women more easily adapted to the physical demands of life at sea because they were likely from the same class background as their male crewmates and understood the social cues and expectations of interactions with members of this class.

Women also correctly performed as sailors because of gender connotations associated with clothing and appearance. For example, if an individual appeared in male or female clothing, their gender was accepted as the gender of the clothing they wore. Zoi Arvanditidou and Maria Gasouka are scholars who theorize about clothing, fashion, and gender identity. I apply their argument that clothing is a “main instrument of the body” (111) and “an integral part of the self,” to women seafarers and; their ability to successfully pass results from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’ understanding of clothing as an outward reflection of an individual’s biological sex. Arvanditou and Gasouka write,

The dress was the most direct contact with the human body and is therefore considered an integral part of the Self. Garments influence and shape the appearance with significant impact on the construction of social identity. That, delegates to others and to the self information about the economic and social situation of the wearer, occupation and nationality, and also individual properties and values. In the dressing, there are types of coded cultural identities and people interact with them through the garments. (111-12)
Arvanditidou and Gasouka argue that clothing signifies identity. Therefore, women seafarer’s choice of proper clothing enhanced their ability to successfully pass as sailors.

Though women strategized their passing by adjusting their voices and practicing their walk or posture, women could more easily pass as sailors because they could disguise their female forms under sailor clothing, which was designed to be loose and non-conforming. Cordingly writes, “The clothes worn by sailors were ideal for disguising a women’s shape. They consisted of a loose shirt and a waist coat or jacket, baggy trousers or petticoat-breeches, which were like culottes, and a handkerchief tied round the neck. Hair was often long and tied in a pigtail or ponytail” (63). Additionally, many women shipped as cabin boys, where their lack of facial hair and higher pitched voices would be less noticeable.

Women who successfully passed as sailors performed a different gender than the one they were assigned at birth. Gender is a social code and a cultural construct that is separate from biological sex. Dianne Dugaw, a historian writing about women heroines, such as seafarers, argues that women successfully passed as seafarers because they appropriately adhered to gender codes associated with seafaring masculinity:

The masquerading heroine enacts gender explicitly as a code.

Commandeering the signifiers of masculine identity, she becomes both a hero and a heroine in an equivocal playing of roles which upholds them while simultaneously exposing them as mutable social forms. Gender is play. It is a costume and script with the Female Warrior [Sailor] enacts with a histrionic ease that is significant for us because it is so startling.

(143)
A women’s ability to successfully pass as a sailor highlights the uncertainty and instability of fixed gender categories, and challenges our twenty-first expectations that eighteenth and nineteenth centuries viewed gender through the rigid boundaries of male/female.

Women sailors also challenged the ideology of separate spheres through the roles they performed at sea and how they performed them. Though many women were from working class backgrounds and performed physical labor outside of the home, women passing as sailors also learned to negotiate their dual identities as a woman and sailor. The women who wrote about their experiences demonstrate their ability to appropriately perform masculinity to adhere to society’s standards while also maintaining their femininity and the virtues associated with the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’ expectations of women’s behavior. As discussed in the previous chapter, genteel society expected men to adhere to “Christian gentility” and society placed similar expectations on women’s performance of womanhood. Barbara Welters argues that women were expected to adhere to the four cardinal virtues of true womanhood: piety, purity, submission, and domesticity. I argue that Sedgwick and Cole’s narratives push against the virtues of submission and domesticity but reinforce the values of piety and purity. Their narratives challenge our understanding of antebellum femininity and define womanhood to include agency.

The sea shanty, “The Female Smuggler” which depicts a tale of a woman (Jane) passing at sea, offers a model for how men and women should appropriately behave in
The shanty articulates how women seafarers negotiate their identities as men and women and perform according to their society’s expectations. In the shanty, Jane’s virtue, bravery, and strength are attractive qualities that men and women should reproduce in society:

O, come listen a while, and you shall hear,
By the rolling sea lived a maiden fair.
Her father followed the smuggling trade,
Like a war-like hero
Like a war-like hero that never was afraid.

Now, in sailor’s clothing young Jane did go,
Dressed like a sailor from top to toe;
Her aged father was her only care
Of this female smuggler,
Of this female smuggler who never did despair.

With her pistols loaded she went abroad
And by her side hung a glittering sword,
In her belt two daggers; well armed for war
Was the female smuggler
Was the female smuggler, who never feared a scar.

Now they had not sailed far from land,
When a strange sail brought them to stand.
“These are sea robbers,” this mad did cry
But the female smuggler,

Though most likely this sea shanty circulated orally in the mid-to-late eighteenth century, the ballad was printed as a broadside in 1850 by George Walker. The “Female Smuggler” is currently archived at the National Library of Scotland as part of the Crawford Collections.
But the female smuggler will conquer or die.

Alongside, then, this strange vessel came,
“Cheer up,” cried Jane, “We will board the same;
We’ll run all changes to rise or fall,”
Cried the female smuggler,
Cried this female smuggler, who never feared a ball.

Now they killed these pirates and took their store
And soon returned to England’s shore.
With a keg of brandy, she walked along.
Did the female smuggler,
Did the female smuggler and sweetly sang a song.

Now they were followed by the blockade
Who in irons put their fair maid
But when they brought her to be tried,
This young female smuggler,
This young female smuggler stood dressed like a bride.

Their commodore against her appeared
And for her life she did greatly fear
When did he find to his great surprise
‘Twas the female smuggler
‘Twas the female smuggler had fought him in disguise.

He to judge and jury said,
“I can prosecute this maid,
Pardon for her on my knees I crave,
For this female smuggler,
For this female smuggler so valiant and brave.”
Then this commodore to her father went,
To gain her hand he asked consent
His consent he gained, so the commodore
And the female smuggler,
And the female smuggler are one forevermore.

“The Female Smuggler” romanticizes the story of a young woman who takes to the sea as a smuggler, an individual who imports/exports goods in secret and in violation of the law. Whereas sailors – particularly naval sailors – contributed to capitalism and nation-building in both Great Britain and the United States, smugglers, similar to pirates, challenged class hierarchy and the burgeoning free-market. According to Markus Rediker, pirates severely threatened “international commerce” (64): “It [piracy] was a way of life voluntarily chosen, for the most part, by a large number of men who directly challenged the ways of society from which they exempted themselves” (63-64). Pirates/smugglers not only threatened the distribution of commerce, but also they challenged hierarchical class structures in Great Britain and the United States.

Yet, despite the negative connotation associated with piracy and the challenges it presents to nationhood, the female smuggler is celebrated in the shanty because of her performance of appropriate gender roles and glass fluidity. First, the female smuggler offers men a model of masculinity to replicate as she is celebrated for her bravery and skills in battle. She leads a crew of men and encourages them to “cheer up” as they head into battle, suggesting that she is not only a leader but also an exemplar of bravery. At the same time, Jane’s character models appropriate femininity through her agency. Though

14 Smugglers “smuggled” goods into ports to avoid paying a tax on customs duties.
Dugaw argues that the woman warrior/sailor “spread the ethos of feminine delicacy to the lower classes” (141), in the shanty, Jane challenges the expectations of women and their roles. She is not a bystander; she actively engages in trade and battle and demonstrates her agency as an individual with autonomy. Instead of spreading the “ethos of feminine delicacy,” Jane spreads the virtues of leadership, independence, and bravery and suggests other women could imitate her behavior. She is not cast as delicate, but she is revered for her strength and courage. She is not rewarded for her submission and domesticity; she is rewarded because of her courage and perseverance.

Though the closing frame of the shanty could be seen as abolishing Jane’s traits of leadership and bravery in a correct performance of womanhood, I argue that her marriage at the end of the shanty further elucidates the importance of these unconventional traits in defining female identity. The officer is attracted to her because of her beauty, bravery, and strength. The closing frame of the shanty further shows that Jane’s characteristics are worthy of being reproduced in society. Though the marriage reinforces “domesticity” and places Jane in an “appropriate” role in the home as wife and presumably mother, the commander’s attraction to Jane symbolizes the appeal of strength, independence, and bravery in women. The shanty, as a romance, ends in marriage; Jane and the commodore’s union reflects the strength of the nation as a cohesive entity. Jane as a wife and mother will stress the importance of bravery, strength, independence, and perseverance in the actions of her husband and children. Her marriage to the naval officer suggests that the traits she possesses will be passed to the next generation and mold citizenship. Here, conventional notions of feminine delicacy, such as submission, are not
celebrated because they do not contribute to the growth and development of a strong and independent nation as it prepares to enter a new millennium.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, women passing as sailors are celebrated in popular culture. According to Luis A. Iglesias, “true accounts of women warriors and sailors were sensationalized in newspapers and magazine exposés. They appeared in a variety of early nineteenth-century periodicals, both American and British, including literary magazines, military chronicles, agricultural digests, and police gazettes” (288). James Fenimore Cooper popularized the genre of sea fiction in the United States and a number of his sea novels, such as *The Pilot* (1824) and *The Red Rover* (1828), include women who pass as sailors. Cooper’s characterization of seafaring women also signals his awareness of women who successfully passed as sailors in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These novels place seafaring women on a pedestal as models for the nation. If Cooper’s sea novels are to be read as a microcosm of the nation, then his decision to cast women as sailors demonstrates the importance of their presence at sea as well as their importance in building national identity. Their presence in Cooper’s novels is not only a strategic tool to grasp the reader’s attention, but their roles in the novel also demonstrate their bravery, their sacrifice, and their patriotism. Cooper provides an optimistic model for women’s roles in the New Republic. Further, in the 1820s, the Early Republic struggled and strived to distinguish itself as a national independent from Great Britain. During this era, the United States saw a rise in sea exploration as it enabled the nation to gain more access to natural resources of unexplored territories. The sea played a large role in shaping the United State’s identity, and Cooper combined the sea and the revolutionary past to define American identity. His
use of cross-dressing women sailors as characters in his novels suggests that strong and independent women play an important role in his vision of American society.

Iglesais further argues that cross-dressing in Cooper’s novels signals mobility in the Atlantic world at the same time that these female characters emphasize “a new kind of American family whose identity emerges from and is disrupted by its relation to commerce and migration” (313). Through his analysis of women seafarers in Cooper’s novel, Iglesais suggests that these women disrupt femininity and domesticity in the United States and propose a new model for U.S. identity and women’s roles within the nation. According to Iglesais, their presence in the novels provides an “unsettling re-conception of women’s labor and effects that labor will have on nineteenth century domesticity” (313). Like Iglesais, I argue that women passing as sailors provide an alternative model for women to follow and illustrate the importance of their roles in the nation. In both The Pilot and The Red Rover, the cross-dressing sailor is celebrated because she transcends her female identity, the roles and behavior associated with that identity, and she performs tasks that are essential to the success of the nation. Through Cooper’s cross-dressing sailors, he demonstrates that women can and do contribute to nationhood. If as a writer Cooper attempts to define the identity of the new nation, the presence of women sailors in his novels highlights the importance of women’s contributions to society and the active role they play in restructuring society.

II. Failed Passing(s) at Sea

Though many women successfully passed because they intuitively responded to the social codes of their new environment, the experience was filled with anxiety of detection. The “Female Smuggler” and the female sailors in James Fenimore Cooper’s
sea novels, however, provide examples of fictional women who successfully pass as sailors. In the shanty, Jane appropriately enacts her masculine identity as a smuggler at sea and performs her femininity on shore to meet the expectations of society. She negotiates her role as man and woman and is able to do so because of her awareness of cultural expectations. Henry Richard Dana Jr.’s *Two Years Before the Mast* offers a canonical example of an upper middle class man’s inability to pass as a seafarer and the consequences that arise as a result of his unsuccessful performance of working class sailor identity. I turn briefly turn to Dana to demonstrate the importance of successfully passing at sea and the dangers of a failed passing. Dana’s failure to successfully pass as a sailor is related to his inability to appropriately respond to the social cues of his new environment. Dana’s narrative, as a canonical text, reminds readers of the difficulty and dangers of life at sea. A failed passing within a small and close community has dire consequences.

Unlike the experience of women passing as sailors, Dana’s time as a seafarer is not filled with anxiety of detection, but the crew’s detection of his “landsman” identity does result in his exclusion from their group and he is never initiated into the community of mariners. His time at sea was likely a lonely experience as his longing for home and shore life suggest. Dana largely fails in his performance of a sailor because he projects his middle-and-upper class Bostonian values onto his crewmates instead of adopting their codes and customs on *The Alert*. He fails to acknowledge the importance of their established system of codes, language, and behavior. For example, when a member of the crew unexpectedly dies by falling overboard, the crew mourns his loss by sharing yarns. Yarns, as Brian Rouleau notes in his article “Dead Men Do Tell Tales: Folklore,
Fraternity, and the Forecastle,” are an important part of sailor culture because they build community (37). More importantly, at sea, the yarn functions as a coping mechanism that helps sailors deal with trauma. When one sailor shares his yarn, the appropriate response is for another sailor to tell his own tale. Yet during this ritual of mourning, Dana either does not understand or ignores the social codes of this community, behavior which further labels him as an “outsider” to his crewmates. Dana instead of sharing in the practice of yarn-telling, criticizes the irrationality of the yarn that was told: “I told him I had no doubt it was true, and that it would be odd if the wind had not changed in fifteen days, Finn or no Finn” (35). Dana’s criticism of the yarn signals to the crew that he does not share their values and he is never initiated as a member of their fraternity. For example, after Dana fails to correctly respond to the yarn, the cook informs him: “‘Oh,’ says he, ‘go way! You tink ‘cause you have been to college, you know better dan anybody. You know dan dem as ‘as seen it wid der own eyes. You wait till you’ve been to sea as long as I have, and den you’ll know” (35). Though members of the middle-and-upper classes occasionally shipped as common tars, the cook shuns Dana because of his rejection of the crew’s established codes. Dana privileges the values of shore life over those of the seafaring community, and he does not successfully pass as a member of this community because he cannot appropriately perform as a sailor. Dana’s narrative demonstrates the difficulty of negotiating different identities in different spaces.

Like Two Years Before the Mast, Catharine Sedgwick’s short story “The Chivalric Sailor” (1835) depicts a failed passing.15 Whereas the “Female Smuggler” and Cooper’s

---

15 “The Chivalric Sailor” is a recovery text that is currently out of print. A manuscript is available via Google Books. To date, no scholar has written on Sedgwick’s short story. To date, no scholar has critically examined “The Chivalric Sailor.” My reading of
sea novels celebrate women’s strength, bravery, and independence, Sedgwick’s short story uses the motif of a woman’s failed attempt to pass as a sailor to define appropriate roles and decorum for antebellum men and women. In brief summary, “The Chivalric Sailor” is about a young wealthy woman, Selena, who passes as a cabin boy named William because she agreed to follow her lover to sea. Her lover, however, is detained on land and Selena/William is left to fend for herself/himself at sea. Though Selena/William is able to physically perform her/his tasks at sea, s/he is tormented by the other sailors and seeks the captain’s protection by revealing her feminine identity. The captain, embarrassed that he allowed a woman to sail with him undetected, imprisons her, and because she is unwilling to reveal her name or background, he renames her Perdita.

Further in the plot, Frank, a young heroic sailor, learns of Perdita’s plight and rescues her. When the first mate discovers Perdita on Frank’s vessel, Frank gallantly protects Perdita, and at the end of the voyage Perdita returns to her father’s home. Years later, Frank and Perdita are reunited when the vessel she is traveling on from London to Antigua is captured by an American vessel commanded by Captain Frank Stuart. At the end of the story, Perdita finally informs Frank of her true identity as Selena and the reason why she passed as a sailor in her youth. Frank is the only individual aware of Selena’s past, and he is rewarded for the safekeeping of her secret through his financial stability and happiness in the United States. Sedgwick’s innovative use of the woman sailor prescribes appropriate roles for men and women through Selena and Frank.

---

Sedgwick’s text is informed by David Cordingly’s analysis of women who passed as sailors; Diane Dugaw’s analysis of the female heroine in ballads, poems, and sea shanties; and Igelesias’ reading of how women passing as seafarers function in Cooper’s novels.
First in my analysis of Sedgwick’s text, I examine Selena’s failed passing and her renaming of Perdita. I argue that Selena is punished for her failed passing as a consequence of her inability to adapt to her new environment and abide by the social codes of her new community. Next, I examine the captain’s behavior when Selena, as William, reveals her feminine identity. I argue that Sedgwick critiques the captain’s behavior as inappropriate because he fails to act with Christian gentility and offer Selena protection. Finally, I close my analysis of Sedgwick’s short story with an analysis of Frank who represents true, U.S. masculinity and citizenship.

Because of their familiarity with the motif of women sailors in the nineteenth century, Sedgwick’s 19th century readers would have expected Selena to be outgoing, adventurous, brave, and independent. Instead, Sedgwick casts Selena as a flat and undeveloped character, and her decision to contradict the expected characteristics of the passing sailor in “The Chivalric Sailor” signals to the reader flaws in Selena’s identity. Selena is a static character who does not develop or grow in the story; her role, though she is a main character, is to highlight the chivalric behavior of Frank who demonstrates appropriate masculinity and defines American citizenship. Yet, prior to the confession of her feminine identity, Selena successfully passes as a sailor despite the crews’ recognition of her “delicate” form and “slim fingers” (119). In passing as a sailor, Selena acts appropriately and modestly, and she models appropriate gentility through her behavior:

In the main Will bore their jokes without flinching, and returned them with even measure, but sometimes when they verged to rudeness, his rising blush or a tear stealing from his downcast eye, expressed an
instinctive and unsullied modesty, whose appeal touched the best feelings of these coarse men. (119)

Here, Selena represents the ideal Christian gentleman as she controls her passions and acts with modesty. Her disapproval of the sailors’ behavior is often met with reform as her “appeal touched the best feelings of these coarse men” (119). At sea, she becomes a model for Christian gentility because she retains her feminine qualities.

Selena’s failed passing is interesting because her feminine identity is not uncovered by the crew; instead, she chooses to confess her identity to the captain and crew. Selena’s decision to reveal her gender is a response to the sailors’ inappropriate behavior. The behavior of the crew and their rowdy demonstrations of masculinity force Selena to seek protection. In revealing Selena’s female gender, Sedgwick also emphasizes the crew’s impropriety that drove Selena to do so:

They, however, stimulated to reckless courage, and in sight of land and independence, no longer fearing his authority, swore they would not be balked for their frolic. Poor Will, already feeling their hands upon him, clung in terror to the captain, and one fear overcoming another confessed that his masculine dress was a disguise and wringing his hands with shame and anguish, supplicated protection as a helpless girl. (120)

Selena’s unsuccessful passing demonstrates her unwillingness to accept new roles in society. Selena’s passing is an act of “shame” and “anguish” and it is not celebrated by crew or captain. Her decision to reveal her female identity is a tactic to escape from the crew’s relentless torment. The crews’ actions and Selena’s decision to inappropriately respond to her social situation are to blame for her failed passing. Yet, Sedgwick
highlights how the crews’ relentless torment drove Selena to seek protection. In an attempt to retain her modesty, Selena chooses not to partake in the fraternity of mariners and risks the consequences of revealing her feminine identity to remain virtuous and pure.

Through “The Chivalric Sailor,” Selena’s identity shifts and she is cast in roles that she does not choose to play. She becomes William because her lover desires her to accompany him to sea, and she is named Perdita by the captain and his family when he learns of her passing. Interestingly, Perdita is also a reference to Shakespeare’s play The Winter’s Tale. Perdita, in Latin, means “the lost one,” and in Shakespeare’s play, Perdita spends most of her life believing she is the daughter of a shepherd, only to find that she is a princess of royal rank. Sedgwick’s use of the name Perdita, as a reference to The Winter’s Tale, suggests that Selena is lost. Not only are the captain and his family unsure of Perdita’s identity, but also Sedgwick’s naming of Perdita also suggests that Selena is unsure of her identity in the New Republic. Selena has the opportunity to act with agency and create a new life for herself, she can remain enslaved, or she can return to her previous identity.

Sedgwick’s decision to cast Selena as passive and submissive departs from her choice to characterize women in Hope Leslie (1827) as strong and independent. In Hope Leslie, Magawisca and Hope provide a new model for American identity and they demonstrate the active role women play in developing and producing a New American society. Suzanne Gossett and Barbara Anne Bardes argue that Hope Leslie is a novel about women’s authority: “Hope Leslie implicitly questions women’s subordination to authority” (13). In the novel, Sedgwick grants her female characters agency and control
because their “insubordination” benefits the common good and the future of the nation. Whereas Magawisca and Hope provide models of femininity for women readers to replicate, in “The Chivalrous Sailor” Selena’s character warns readers about the dangers of passivity and submission. For example, in *Hope Leslie*, Magawisca and Hope celebrate the virtues of the Republic in their actions as they act with “valor, self-sacrifice, individual commitment, and chastity” (19). In “The Chivalric Sailor,” however, Selena fails to demonstrate these American virtues. Selena even differs from Rosalin, who passes as a male in *Hope Leslie* for love; Rosalin braves peril and sacrifices life so Hope and Everell can save Magawisca and build a future together. In the short story, Selena’s failed passing demonstrates her inability to act with the independence and mobility. Selena’s dependence and submission are punishable offenses in Sedgwick’s vision of womanhood and U.S. identity.

Selena’s failed passing serves to further highlight inappropriate demonstrations of masculinity. The captain is presented as a foil to Selena’s appropriate performance of masculinity when she passes as Will. When the captain learns of Selena’s passing, he fails to act with Christian gentility and offer Selena protection. The sailors, upon learning Selena’s true identity, are filled with sympathy and pity for her situation whereas the captain seeks revenge against Selena for her deception:

> The sailors touched with remorse and pity retreated; but the brutal captain spurred the trembling supplicant with his foot, swearing a round oath that it was the first time he had been imposed on, and it should be the last…He swore he would have his revenge…The captain’s wrath was magnified, by
the stranger’s persisting in refusing to disclose the motive of her
deception, to reveal her family, or even to tell her name. (120)

In this excerpt, Sedgwick highlights the gentility of the sailors and shows that their
demeanor towards Selena positively changes when she reveals her feminine identity. On
the other hand, the captain fails to act with chivalry and expresses anger for being duped
by Selena’s disguise. As punishment, he enslaves Selena on his plantation.

Selena’s failed passing thus highlights inappropriate behavior in men by
negatively emphasizing the captain’s malicious attitude towards her. While Christian
gentleman are to control their passions and act with self-constraint, Sedgwick indicates
the defects in the captain’s character and his inability to adhere to the tenets of
Christianity:

The captain, a common case, was the severest sufferer by his own
passions…and neighbors and acquaintances were forever letting fall some
observations on the beauty of the girl, or some illusion to her story that
was a spark of fire to the captain’s gunpowder temper. (121)

The captain’s inability to control his anger and to act with the dignity that his wife,
daughters, and neighbors expect signals to the reader the captain’s improper behavior.
Though Selena’s entrapment is a result of her own decisions, Sedgwick also suggests that
Selena’s imprisonment is a result of the captain’s inability to control his passions and act
according to the tenets of Christianity.

The captain’s actions are further condemned when the young sailor, Frank Stuart,
enters the scene. He acts with bravery, displays his strength, courage, and independence –
important characteristics that define Christian gentility and U.S. citizenship in the
nineteenth century. He also offers Selena the protection that her captain fails to provide. His character presents the importance of masculine duty, responsibility, and decorum: “‘If you trust me,’ he continued, ‘I swear, and so God help me as I speak the truth, I will treat you as if you were my sister” (122). Here, Stuart’s duty to Selena is one of chivalry and gentility. He seeks to protect her because it is the noble thing to do. Sedgwick’s departure from the female sailor plot trajectory and the use of Stuart, not Selena, as the hero suggests that his qualities should be modeled by a nation trying redefine identity.

Sedgwick’s decision to cast Stuart as the exemplar of American masculinity (and identity) may seem an unusual choice because antebellum society severely critiqued sailors and their behavior. Yet, sailors were also popular fictional characters who, in the case of Horatio Alger’s *Charlie Chapman* and Lydia Sigourney’s poem “The Hero,” stress the importance of proper behavior, gentlemanly duties, and benevolent, heroic actions. While Sedgwick’s choice of a seaman to define appropriate Christian gentility may seem odd in juxtaposition to Stowe’s decision to cast Legree as the antithesis of gentility, it is not an uncommon tactic. If the sea functions as the microcosm of the nation in nineteenth century U.S. fiction, fictional seamen must display appropriate qualities that model national values. As Nathan Perl-Rosenthal argues, seamen defined the borders of American citizenship (5). Not only did American sailors extend the physical borders of the United States, but they also played an important role in negotiating the murky lines of

---

16 Horatio Alger’s *Charlie Chapman* is a novel about a young, poor boy who is kidnapped and sent to sea as a sailor. His captain and first mate terrorize and torment him, and a veteran sailor protects him. At the end of the novel, he is reunited with his mother who marries a wealthy man, and the sailor who protected him is rewarded through promotion to captain. “The Hero” is a poem by Lydia Sigourney. In the poem, the sailor, on leave in port, rescues a child from a burning house. This poem will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.
citizenship. Stowe, Sedgwick, Alger, and Sigourney’s literary works use seamen to define citizenship through appropriate behavior.

While Stowe uses Legree’s character to define the antithesis of gentility, Sedgwick not only characterizes Frank Stuart as a model for appropriate masculinity, but also she exemplifies the qualities of citizenship in the Early Republic through his character. Sedgwick emphasizes Stuart’s rejection of authority when his beliefs of right and wrong are questioned by the members of the crew. For example, when Stuart rescues Selena and hides her on his ship, *The Hazard*, Stuart does not reveal her presence despite the risk and potential consequences concealing her might cause:

The master of *The Hazard* declared, that if any of his men were found guilty, he would resign them to the dealings of land law, and to prove that if there were a plot, he was quite innocent, he not only freely abandoned his vessel to the search, but himself was most diligent in the conquest. The men were called up, confronted and examined; not one appeared more cool and unconcerned than Frank Stuart, and after every inquiry, after ransacking, as they believed, every possible place of concealment, the pursuers were compelled to withdraw, baffled and disappointed. (124)

Here, Stuart offers American readers an ideal vision of individual and national identity that is built on determination, strength, courage, resolve, and selflessness. Despite the pressure from his captain, Stuart appropriately performs masculinity to protect Selena. He is able to negotiate the social cues and codes of his environment and respond to them accordingly.
Though nineteenth century U.S. society viewed violent demonstrations of masculinity negatively, Stuart’s strength is presented as a positive characteristic in “The Chivalric Sailor” because it is used to protect Selena. Stuart only resorts to physical violence when Selena is discovered by the first mate and Stuart’s pleas of sympathy and reason do not persuade the first mate to keep Selena’s secret. First, Stuart rationally appeals to the first mate to consider Selena’s hardships. When the first mate fails to become emotionally invested in Selena’s misfortune, Stuart appeals to the mate’s charity and gentility as he assumes that the first mate, a member of American middle-class society, will appropriately perform his Christian duties. Stuart turns to physical violence as a last resort and demonstrates his strength and bravery. Through Stuart’s physical strength, Sedgwick shows that compassion and gentility do not weaken or create effeminate men:

Stop and hear me; I swear by Him that made me, if you dare so much as to hint by word, look or movement, the secret you have discovered here, you shall not cumber the earth another day – day – I said – no not an hour – I’ll send you to the devil as swift as a canon ball ever went to the mark – Look…could any thing sort of the malice of station himself contrive to harm such a helpless innocent as that – do you hear me? (131)

Here, Sedgwick shows that Stuart performs a masculinity that is compassionate as well as tough. Importantly though, he performs toughness as the last effort to protect Selena. Sedgwick suggests that physical strength is an important component of gentility but such displays must be warranted and used cautiously. Stuart only threatens violence after the first mate fails to act according to Christian gentility; Stuart responds to the social cues of
the situation further demonstrating his ability to negotiate his masculine persona. For Stuart, force, strength, and agency are positive characteristics of masculinity because he uses them to protect Selena. His character further demonstrates the complexities of nineteenth century manhood.

If Stuart, as I have argued, represents the ideals of Christian gentility in antebellum society and models appropriate behavior for citizens, then why does Sedgwick’s plot not end in his marriage to Selena, whom he romantically desires? In antebellum and Victorian stories, as Kathy Alexis Psomiades argues, the marriage plot is political and represents larger social structures: “novels…drew upon theories about the relationship between marriage and larger social structures that ultimately inflected their metaphorical and structural uses of marriage” (53). Marriage in fiction, as Psomiades suggests, “diffuses political information” (53). The fact that “The Chivalric Sailor” does not end in the union of Stuart and Selena suggests that the flaws in Selena’s character are problematic. She is not an appropriate partner for Stuart because of her immobility; she lacks the feminine characteristics and agency to contribute to building nationhood in the nineteenth century. For most of the story, Selena’s identity is unknown, representing Selena’s ambiguous position because she does not know where she belongs in society. As women’s roles change in the Early Republic, Sedgwick, through Selena’s character, demonstrates that women need to be active and independent and define their own identities. In failing to assert her own identity, Selena is defined by others, which Sedgwick deems as problematic to identity in the New Republic.

Selena’s identity is problematic in the New Republic because, by definition, she is a “slipping heroine.” A “slipping heroine,” as defined by Catharine England, has “trouble
maintaining a flattering social identity” (110). Selena’s identity is constantly in shift. She fails to perform as William the sailor, she reluctantly performs as the enslaved Perdita, and she returns to her identity as Selena, the daughter of an aristocrat, at the end of the sketch. For most of the short story, her history is unknown to both the reader and to Stuart. Though the secretiveness of Selena’s history and her “damsel in distress” performance as Perdita is attractive to Stuart, Sedgwick warns her readers that Selena’s inability to reinvent herself and overcome obstacles on her own is dangerous to U.S. identity and nationhood. She is not the ideal choice for Stuart because she remains static and cannot adapt to her new environment. Marriage is political, and Selena will not be the partner that Stuart (or the nation) needs to build a foundation for the future. Despite her shifting identities, Selena fails to appropriately perform femininity. While, for example, Hope is placed on a pedestal for women to strive to imitate in *Hope Leslie* for her actions of bravery, independence, and agency, Selena’s character falls short because she does not possess Hope’s qualities. Whereas Cooper portrays his seafaring women as heroines who are praised for their bravery, Sedgwick warns women readers about the consequences of their failure to appropriately define their identities and act with agency and independence. Cooper’s use of strong, independent seafaring women in his plots offers women a role in antebellum society and demonstrates how they actively define citizenship. By contrast, Sedgwick’s “The Chivalric Sailor” warns women readers that unless they enact their own agency and actively define their identities in the New

---

17 Here I use the word sketch as “The Chivalric Sailor” was published in Sedgwick’s short story collection *Tales and Sketches* in 1835.
Republic, they will be “lost in society” and remain submissive to men who define their identities for them.

III. Successful Passings

While “Chivalric Sailor” offers an account of a woman who fails to pass as a sailor, some autobiographical accounts of women passing as sailors highlight the freedom and liberty women access in acting and dressing like a man. For instance, in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), Harriet Jacobs briefly passes as a sailor because the disguise provides her with mobility and enables her to escape undetected from her first place of hiding to her second place of hiding in her grandmother’s shed. Though Jacobs’ passing is a minor moment in the larger narrative, this episode of passing is interesting because it not only offers Jacobs a brief moment of mobility but it also provides insight on how women performed their gender passing and how they felt about their performance. Jacobs writes:

> Betty brought me a suit of sailor’s clothes – jacket, trowsers [sic], and tarpaulin hat… ‘Put your hands in your pockets, and walk rickety, like de sailors.’ I performed to her satisfaction. At the gate I found Peter, a young colored man, waiting for me… ‘Take courage, Linda,’ said Peter…It was a long time since I had taken a walk out of doors, and the fresh air revived me. It was also pleasant to hear a human voice speaking to me above a whisper. I passed several people whom I knew, but they did not recognize me in my disguise. (125)

The success of Jacobs’ passing provides her with freedom and mobility. In temporarily passing as a black sailor, Jacobs finds freedom and opportunity that would otherwise
have been denied to her as an enslaved woman. Jeffery Bolsters describes that black, free seafarers had more freedom than other black men. He writes, “black seamen found access to privilege, worldliness, and wealth” (par 1015). Black seafarers were common in both the North and the South, and in passing as a sailor, Jacobs can avoid being questioned by a white individual. The disguise of a sailor communicates to other members of the community that she is unattached to a plantation, distanced from a master, and economically independent. Her pride in her performance of gender crossing signals her ability to participate in society as a free, independent individual. In passing as a seafarer, Jacobs performs her freedom and her ability to participate in American society, despite her current identity as an enslaved black woman. Though the disguise is an appropriate choice to avoid recognition of her identity and questions about her mobility, the disguise only works because she successfully, although temporarily, performs as a seafarer. She recognizes that sailors dress, walk, and behave in a certain way and she adjusts her behavior to meet the social codes and expectations of this community. Despite her fears of being discovered and the emphasis she places on her feminine virtues as an inherent component of her identity in the narrative, Jacobs successfully performs the male persona. Peter’s warning to “take courage” also implies that bravery is a necessary component of male identity. To successfully pass, even briefly, Jacobs must do more than appear as a male sailor, she must perform as one. Jacobs’ successful passing results in her ability to elude Dr. Flint, her escape, and her eventual freedom.

Like Harriet Jacobs, Emma Cole Hanson uses cross-dressing and performance as a sailor to obtain access to freedom, mobility, and financial security that would otherwise be denied to women from the working class. *The Life and Sufferings of Miss Emma Cole:*
Being a Faithful Narrative of her Life (1844) depicts hardships that Cole experiences in her adolescence, the events that forced her to pass as a sailor, her adventures and exploits as a sailor/pirate, and the actions that led to her re-assimilation into society as a woman.\(^\text{18}\)

Cole’s narrative follows the trajectory of a traditional female sailor passing plotline. She passes as a sailor to escape detrimental consequences and to access financial opportunities that are otherwise denied to her because of her class and gender status. Cole successfully performs her duties as a sailor and demonstrates her strength and courage. When, back on shore, she reveals her, feminine identity, she is rewarded with marriage.

In my analysis of Cole, I first examine the reasons that led to her decision to pass. Next, I examine her successful performance as a sailor. Finally, I conclude the analysis with her return to shore society, her decision to reveal her feminine identity, and society’s acceptance of her identity. Throughout my analysis, I examine how Cole justifies her actions to meet middle-class expectations about gender, class, and citizenship.

Before I begin my analysis of Cole’s narrative, it is important to discuss the possibility that the story line might be fictionalized or contain fictional elements. “The events of Cole’s account mirror fiction, and no doubt the text raises questions about whether or not Cole experienced all that she described. The subtitle “Faithful Narrative of Her Life,” implies a true account, but the narrative is published shortly after Deborah Samson’s actual narrative and Lucy Brewer’s fictional narrative.\(^\text{19}\) Though the true

\(^{18}\) David Reynolds discusses Cole’s narrative briefly in Beneath the American Renaissance (1988) when he examines womanhood in the U.S. during the nineteenth century. Michel Sorbel also briefly discusses Cole’s narrative in terms of its authenticity as well as its evangelical agenda. I argue that Cole’s narrative contributes to building U.S. citizenship through Cole’s performance of femininity and masculinity.

\(^{19}\) During the American Revolution, Deborah Sampson disguised herself as a man and fought for the Patriots. For two years, Sampson’s true sex escaped detection. The story of
account of Samson’s passing demonstrates the possibility of women passing as men in battle and at sea, Cole’s narrative, like Brewer’s, contains fictionalized events and unrealistic plot twists. Plot climaxes in the narrative, such as being orphaned as a child or kidnapped by pirates, too closely resemble other accounts, such as Ann Bonny or Mary Read. Yet, there is a chance that the events of the narrative are based on truth and only certain aspects were embellished to attract readers. Mechal Sobel notes that several of these cross-dressing sailor accounts are “fictive, written and published by men as business ventures” (196), but to contemporary readers, the authenticity of the text did not matter. Sobel states,

…they [fictive accounts] played a role parallel to those played by the ‘true’ life narratives providing individual with role models and ideals. These books read as though they were written by women who had experienced life as transvestors, and they drew on the experience of others who had really had such experiences. (196)

Therefore, although the authenticity of the narrative is an interesting matter to consider, I argue that whether it is Cole’s true account or not does not matter because these powerful images of women’s agency and mobility circulated in nineteenth century popular culture. The narrative, whether true or not, is presented to readers as a true account and marketed to readers as a lived experience.

______________________________

her life was written by Herman Mann and published as The Female Review: Or, Memoirs of an American Young Lady (1797). Lucy Brewer, likely the pen name of the author of The Female Marine, Or The Adventures of Lucy Brewer (1815), the supposedly true (although some believe the narrative is actually penned by Nathaniel Hill Wright) account of a young woman who disguised herself as a sailor.
Throughout the narrative, Cole mirrors the Franklin model of American identity as she builds (and rebuilds) her identity from nothing.\(^{20}\) For example, early in the narrative Cole is accused of stealing silver from her employers. Although she protests her innocence, she is forced to leave their home and her reputation is stained. While her chastity remains in tact because she is able to ward off her masculine attacker, her honesty and morality are called into question because her employers value his accusation over her truthful confession:

I fell on my knees at their feet, and called heaven to witness that I was innocent of the dreadful charges they had made, and implored them not to cast me off…they said they would not listen to my words, for they had caught me already in several falsehoods, and therefore would hear nothing more from me. (8)

Here, a class hierarchy exists between Cole and her employers, but a gender hierarchy also exists. Though her male attacker is unsuccessful in his attempt to sexually assault Cole, he still ruins her reputation. Because her accuser/attacker is both a man and a member of the upper class, his word is believed. The reader recognizes the injustice done to Cole in this situation and likely critiques her attacker and her employer’s behavior because neither act as Christians; instead they turn a poor, innocent girl out of their home.

\(^{20}\) In Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography, he offers readers a model of American identity. Franklin, who comes from nothing, is able to reinvent himself. He advocates for the “self-made” man who was able to rise from poverty and access middle-upper class American society by appropriately performing his masculinity to meet cultural expectations.
Although Cole is abandoned, she resolves to accept the reality of her own situation. Unlike Selena, she does not rely on a male rescuer to pave her path. Cole’s narrator writes, “I wandered a few steps, and fainted. When I revived, it was with much difficulty that I could convince myself that it was a dream; but alas, I soon found that it was reality” (8). Though the act of fainting in response to this emotional crisis can be seen as a sign of Cole’s fragility and a demonstration of her femininity, reviving from the fainting spell on her own challenges cultural stereotypes that femininity is weak and passive. The fainting shows that she can appropriately perform her femininity, but she also challenges this model and offers an alternative to feminine passivity. By reviving on her own after fainting, she takes control of her situation and future. Cole’s ability to revive from the fainting spell without being rescued by a male hero signals a new consciousness. She awakens as a woman who accepts her circumstances and is prepared to do whatever possible to survive. In reviving from the fainting spell, Cole demonstrates her agency.

Equally important, when Cole revives from her fainting spell, she seeks shelter for the evening rather than being found and offered shelter by an individual passing by. In finding shelter on her own, Cole demonstrates her tenacity as a woman who is able to overcome her situation. Because there is no one to provide for her, she asserts her agency and provides for herself. Despite her reputation as a “fallen woman” and her destitute circumstances, she pledges to redefine herself and build her character as a virtuous individual: “I declared that not temptation could shake my resolution, or make me serve from the paths of rectitude…I resolved to learn virtue’s side, even at the hazard of my life” (10). Cole’s revival from her fainting spell demonstrates her new consciousness; her
determination signals her strength and bravery to embark on a new course and rebuild her identity. While strength and bravery are highlighted in Cole’s character and she becomes the heroine of her story, her pledge of rectitude and to “learn virtue” illustrates the importance of acting with moral virtue and according to the tenets of Christianity. She models behavior for antebellum women to replicate. Cole’s narrative redefines antebellum femininity to include strength, bravery, and perseverance as well as the traditional modesty, piety, and virtue.

Despite Cole’s pledge to live a life of rectitude, she is challenged by temptations and events that further call her character and reputation into question. For example, Cole finds herself employed in a brothel and when a sea captain attempts to sexually assault her, Cole stabs him with his dirk. This event ultimately leads to her passing as a sailor. Though Cole protests her innocence by writing “if I had killed the man, it was in defence [sic] of my honor” (15), her decision to pass as a sailor signals that her performance of modesty is threatened by an individual’s inappropriate demonstration of masculinity. Despite her innocence, she remains labeled by society as a “fallen woman.” On a plot level, passing as a sailor provides Cole with a practical disguise and a successful escape from her unfortunate circumstances. As a sailor, Cole’s behavior does not change and the narrative continues as a didactic tale about appropriate behavior. She continues to adhere to a life of righteousness, and – unlike when she performs as a woman – her character and her demonstrations of virtue and modesty remain unthreatened during her passing.

If, as Robin Miskolcze suggests, sailor passing narratives provide a model for appropriate masculinity, in Cole’s passing as a sailor she appropriately performs
While her passing shows that femininity influences her performance of masculinity, it also shows that appropriate masculinity protects femininity. Cole’s narrative illustrates that society expects men and women to adhere to the same standards of decorum and deviance by either gender threatens the social system and codes of conduct. As a further example, when Cole is kidnapped by pirates during her passing, her feminine identity remains undetected, and she is given the ultimatum of either joining their gang or death. Even in the situation when her life is threatened, Cole abides by her promise of rectitude and states, “I preferred death rather than shed a fellow-being’s blood, except in defence [sic] of life. This enraged them, and I was dragged by my hair to the yard-arm, and there secured” (18). By choosing not to reveal her feminine identity, which could have possibly garnered the pirates’ sympathies and ensured her freedom and safe return to shore, she places her destiny in her own hands. Instead, she relies on her own bravery and tenacity to overcome the situation. In choosing death over a life of piracy, bloodshed, and plundering, she demonstrates that she has overcome her identity as a “fallen woman” and she has redefined herself as a righteous individual. Her reputation can no longer be questioned.

In this moment she transitions from the “fallen woman” into the heroine of the narrative. Regardless of her gender identity at this moment in the narrative, her response to the pirates is appropriate. Pirates, as Marcus Rediker argues, collectively represented a transgression against society (71). They were “masterless men” who threatened “traditional authority” (87), and ultimately piracy was a failed experiment in the

21 Miskolecze argues that the purpose of female passing accounts is to teach “men teaching men how to be men, republican citizens who represent America’s exceptionally moral, Christian nature” (123).
eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These pirates threaten American society, and Cole’s rejection of their offer to spare her life if she joins their gang demonstrates that her new consciousness as she comes into her feminine maturity does not threaten U.S. society. Instead, by being tied to the yard-arm, she is placed on a pedestal for other Americans to model. The yard-arm functions as an appropriate metaphor for a pedestal of behavior since the yard-arm is designed to rotate around the mast to allow the direction of the ship to be changed relative to the wind. In being anchored to the yard arm she demonstrates the importance of Americans adopting new qualities or adjusting their behavior in order to meet the needs of the new nation. In this moment, she perfectly models U.S. citizenship.

The narrative further reinforces her appropriate behavior when the pirate crew is captured and the crew, previously described as heartless, attest to her innocence. In the last moments of their lives, the pirate captain and his crew are influenced by Cole’s appropriate demonstrations of courage, virtue, and perseverance and correctly perform masculinity to save her life:

Standing before a judge, in the presence of a jury that were sworn to acquit or condemn according to testimony, I knew my case to be hopeless, unless there should be discovered one spark of pity or humanity in the hearts of the condemned wretches, who were soon to stand before a higher tribunal and receive the sentence of the Judge of Heaven…After a few moments of breathless silence, during which my destiny was decided, the pirate captain arose, and asking permission, said he had a few words to say before the court proceeded further…The mate confirmed the captain’s
story. By this voluntary act of benevolence on the part of the condemned, I
was acquitted and set at liberty.

The emphasis Cole places on the captain and his crew’s behavior as humane and
benevolent show that these are redeeming qualities in masculine behavior. Whereas
previously the pirates were defined as heartless men who were bloodthirsty, they are now
honest men who save an innocent individual’s life. More importantly, Cole never reveals
her feminine identity to jury or judge and the pirates and men are not swayed to
sympathize with her because she is a damsel in distress. Rather, her successful
performance of masculinity, based on her feminine characteristics, persuade other men to
reform their behavior. Here, the recognition of her innocence restores Cole’s identity as a
heroine. She is not condemned and her liberty affirms her rightful place in society.

After Cole’s adventures at sea, she returns to the United States and continues to
pass as a man because she faces limitations as a woman of the working class. Cole
continues to pass out of necessity rather than choice because she wishes to retain her
independence: “…the more I meditated the worse my situation seemed, and I almost gave
myself up to despair. I was not able to labor with men, nor was I skilled in needle-work,
and having a neglected education, was not qualified to establish a school” (23). She
recognizes that as a woman she has access to few financial opportunities. While a man
can remake himself and be rewarded through reform of his behavior and hard work, a
woman who redefines herself does not have access to the same freedom and class
mobility. Cole is only able to return to her feminine identity once she finds financial
security as a man. Cole’s continued passing, despite the restoration of her virtuous
character, critiques the opportunities afforded to women in society. Although she is no longer a fallen woman, she remains an impoverished one.

Cole only finds financial security through her continued and successful performance of masculinity on shore. Though she does not find employment that offers her financial stability, her fearlessness and courage are rewarded by a wealthy family who see value in her character despite her working class background and her impoverished circumstances. Without thought, even though she is a woman, Cole appropriately performs her masculinity by jumping into the water to save a young girl from drowning: “I expected the father to plunge in and rescue her…I resolved to make an effort for her when she again appeared, though I should perish with her. I knew this would be the last opportunity to save her” (25). Here, Cole’s selfless actions further redeem her from her reputation as a “fallen woman” placed on her by society at the beginning of the narrative. Her appropriate demonstrations of courage, bravery, and strength are presented as ideal qualities of masculinity when used to defend the defenseless. Through this selfless act, the family adopts Cole into their family, and she gains entry into middle-and-upper middle class society and is granted financial security because her actions show that her morals align with the Early Republic’s values. Cole’s performance of civil duty demonstrates that she is virtuous and faithful. The fact that she appropriately responds to her situation and acts as an ideal U.S. citizen should act when the father fails to rescue his daughter, demonstrates her ability to read social cues and perform accordingly. Further, it elucidates woman’s active role in citizenship. Though she passes as a man, Cole also performs this brave act as a woman. If she is placed on the
pedestal by the child’s father as the “perfect man,” she is also the “perfect woman” as her feminine identity informs her actions as a passing male.

Cole’s bravery and selflessness provide individuals, particularly men, with a model of how to perform not only their masculinity but also their citizenship. In fact, Cole’s behavior provides a model for other young men from the working class to access citizenship. For example, Lydia Sigourney’s poem, “The Hero,” closely resembles Cole’s selfless act and further defines how men, as U.S. citizens, are supposed to act in society:

Ah! fearful was the sight!

The fire devouring spread

From room to roof, from street to street,

And on their treasures fed;

Hark! to that Mother’s cry

Amid the tumult wild,

As rushing toward her flame-wrapped home,

She shrieks, “My child! my child!”

A wanderer from the wave

A sailor marked her woe

And in his feeling bosom woke

The sympathetic glow,

Quick up the cleaving stairs,

With daring step he flew,

Though sable clouds of stifling some

Concealed him from the view;
Loud was the admiring voice,
Yet mix’d with shuddering fear
For him, who nobly risk’d his life,
Mov’d by a stranger’s tear;
The blazing timbers fell
Across his dangerous road,
And the far chamber where he groped;
Like reeking oven glow’d.

How high the exulting shout!
When from that mass of flame,
Unhurt, unshrinking, undismayed,
The brave deliverer came,
While in his victor arms
A smiling infant lay,
Pleased with the flash that round his bed
Had wound its glittering ray.

The mother’s speechless tears
Forth like a torrent shed,
Yet ere the throng could learn his name
That generous hero fled;
Not for the praise of man
He wrought this deed of love,
But, on a bright unfading page,
‘Tis registered above. (127 – 129)22

In Cole’s account of rescuing the child and Sigourney’s poem, women writers define masculinity and citizenship through the behavior of sailors in their texts. Sigourney’s poem, like Cole’s account, highlights the sailor’s noble actions. The sailor, who is typically stereotyped by society as an outcast, appropriately responds to his social context with sympathy, bravery, and benevolence.

The lines “A sailor marked her woe/ And in his feeling bosom woke/ The sympathetic glow” (lines 10 – 12), for example, show that the sailor empathizes with the helpless mother’s desperate pleas. The sailor positively responds to the mother’s appeal for sympathy and he endangers his own life to save her child. Yet, his response to emotional sentiment does not label him as weak. Instead, Sigourney emphasizes his bravery and strength as the poem’s persona remarks that the sailor is “unhurt, unshrinking, undiminished” (line 27). The line shows that the sailor is unharmed by his heroic act, but the word choice “unshrinking, undiminished” demonstrates that in performing this selfless act his manhood and character remain in tact. His strength and rougher masculinity are necessary in this situation, and he is deemed a hero rather than a villain in U.S. society. While Myra C. Glenn argues that many nineteenth century men saw the sea as an escape from an increasingly feminized society that suffocated their

22 The Hero is published in her poetry volume Poems for the Sea (1850) is based on a true account that occurred in New York on December 16, 1836
masculinity, Sigourney’s poem and Cole’s account suggest that strength, bravery, and demonstrations of “rougher” masculinity are essential to defining nineteenth century U.S. manhood and citizenship. Cole and Sigourney’s sailors both save defenseless children who represent the next generation of Americans and the future of the nation. Men like Cole and Sigourney’s sailor are necessary to protect the growing nation. Though these sailors, especially Cole, attempt to adhere to “Christian gentility,” they also challenge it by suggesting that appropriate masculinity (or femininity) depends on an individual’s ability to correctly respond to the social cues of their environment. Cole’s narrative and Sigourney’s poem demonstrate that Americans must be adaptable.

Like Sigourney’s heroic sailor, Cole is rewarded for her ability to adapt and respond to the social codes of her environment and social situation. When she saves the young girl from drowning, she is labeled a U.S. hero because of her courage, selflessness, and appropriate response of humility: “I had done nothing more than my duty” (26). Because she acts as an American citizen should, she is adopted into a family who has access to citizenship: “I was now informed that a situation would be provided for me in his store, and that I was to live with his family…Their treatment of me was the same as though I had been their child. Their lives were an exemplification of Christian Charity” (27). If we read Cole’s adoptive family as the body politic, the family functions as a model for the nation to follow.23 In defining the family as the ideal example of “Christian Charity,” Cole suggests that U.S. citizens are responsible for treating others with equality, human dignity, and compassion; these actions contribute to the nation’s common welfare.

23 The body politic is a metaphor in which a state or society and its institutions are conceived as a human body. Here, the family, as the body, represents that nation and how Americans as a collective group are to correctly perform in society.
The family not only functions as a foil to Cole’s own family, or the Smith family, who abandon her, but they provide a model for other families and the nation to replicate. Since these true exemplifiers of Christian charity remain nameless in Cole’s narrative, she suggests that this family could be any middle or upper-middle class family in the United States.

Cole is only able to reveal her feminine identity and return to it after she has gained access to citizenship by performing modesty, virtue, courage, and humility: values shared by Americans in the Early Republic. Her new family’s acceptance of her feminine identity further signals that these are appropriate qualities for nineteenth century woman to also practice. When Cole confesses to her benefactors that that she is a woman, they warmly accept her as such:

When I had finished, instead of upbraiding me, they showed every mark of tenderness and affection for me. They pledged themselves that I should not want as long as providence was bountiful to them…I was asked if I should not like to change my dress for that of a female. I replied I should be greatly rejoiced to do so, especially as I had now found protecting friends. (28 – 29)

The acceptance of Cole’s feminine identity shows that women play an important role in crafting national identity and citizenship. Her new family does not challenge her feminine modesty or virtue as they believe that her reputation as a woman will be restored because she has displayed qualities associated with U.S. citizenship. Cole, however, demonstrates her unease in performing as a woman. Her dress and her appearance as a woman, like her sailor clothing, becomes a costume: “My dress now appeared as odd to me as when I first
put on male attire. Whilst my hair remained short, I supplied my head with false braids. I was sent to school, and every care taken to make me an ornament in society” (29). The unease Cole feels in her own clothing mirrors the apprehension she feels in performing her feminine identity. When Cole reflects on her time with the pirates and compares, she appears thankful that her situation has changed. Yet, she uses the phrase “ornament in society” to describe the expectations associated with her role as a woman. In comparing her current situation to her previous pirate captivity, Cole has exchanged one form of imprisonment for another. As a sailor, Cole had the autonomy to choose her own path. As a woman, she struggles to craft a space for herself in society where her individuality is valued.

Though Cole’s narrative ends in a happy marriage to a wealthy Bostonian, her sailor passing illustrates women’s potential to be more than wife and mother. During her passing, her feminine qualities of modesty and virtue inform her masculine identity. She not only successfully passes, but she also avoids being condemned to death as a pirate. Her dedication to living a virtuous life results in her developing qualities such as strength and humility. These masculine qualities that grant her access to citizenship also inform her feminine identity. After her reputation as a woman is restored by the confession of the man who had earlier attempted to assault her, she becomes the perfect woman. By practicing citizenship while disguised as a man, Cole can raise her children to be ideal American citizens, as she closes her narrative by stating, “It had always been my study and delight to train up my offspring in the paths of virtue and uprightness, instilling early into their young minds the importance of obeying the divine commands, and the fearful consequences of the least disobedience” (35). Here, Cole performs “Republican
Motherhood” and raises her children in her image. As her successful passing demonstrates, she chooses to play this role in society. Throughout the narrative, she is a moral influencer, instructing men and women on how to properly behave in order to gain access to U.S. citizenship.

In summary, Cole’s narrative models proper behavior for both men and women through her passing and performance as a sailor. Cole overcomes her limitations and obtains her independence. In passing as a male, she becomes the perfect woman and retains her virtue. In retaining her virtue as a male, she exemplifies ideal masculinity and citizenship. As an individual of the working class, a woman, a woman who passes as a sailor, and, by the narrative’s end, a wealthy woman, she is placed on a pedestal for the U.S. public – regardless of class or gender – to model and admire. In the nineteenth century, any reader, regardless of their station in life, can identify with Cole’s character.

IV. Conclusion

Sedgwick and Cole craft two very different passing narratives, yet both narratives define appropriate behavior for men and women in society. Importantly, both narratives counter the notion that Christian gentility is a weakened gentility. During her passing, Cole acts with strength and courage while maintaining her virtue and modesty. Frank, in Sedgwick’s “The Chivalrous Sailor,” also displays an appropriate use of strength. Their performance of masculinity, despite their adherence to a higher code of conduct, is not weak or fragile. Frank and Cole are presented as U.S. heroes. Thus they are the model of U.S. citizens. In “The Chivalrous Sailor,” Selena is characterized as passive and lacking autonomy. She is unable to adapt to the changes in her social environment, and instead her circumstances and their consequences imprison her. Unlike Cole, she does not rebuild
her character to overcome the obstacles placed in her way. The secrecy of her identity, which drives the plot, further demonstrates that there are shortcomings in Selena’s character. Though Frank desires Selena, their marriage is impractical because she fails in her performance of masculinity and femininity. Women like Selena, as her marriage to a wealthy planter in Antigua demonstrates, are not ideal partners and do not belong in the New Republic because they lack the qualities to morally instruct their husband and children. Cole’s narrative, on the other hand, paves the way for feminine autonomy in the United States. As a woman, she advocates for female independence by her ability to respond and overcome the consequences of her situation. During her passing as a male, she demonstrates that women are no different than men. Not only does she perform the same roles physically as her male counterparts, but she possesses the qualities that are deemed essential to U.S. citizenship. Cole is the precursor for “New Womanhood,” and her narrative expands woman’s ability to engage in a more active world. The maritime context offers female writers and female characters the possibility of stepping temporarily outside the bounds of their accepted gender roles in order to model new possibilities.
Chapter 3

Nineteenth-Century Middle-Class Women at Sea:
Revisiting the Archive, Re-evaluating Women’s Lives

Before the emergence of the New Woman at the end of the nineteenth century, U.S. women who went to sea pushed the limits and boundaries of expected decorum in society. This chapter examines women’s sea journals to analyze nineteenth-century women’s roles, how they felt about their roles, and how they actively redefined their roles as the century progressed. Seafaring women challenged society’s expectations of ideal femininity in the eighteenth and nineteenth century in a similar way to “New Womanhood” at the end of the nineteenth century, but the term “New Woman” was not coined until the publication of Charles Reade’s novel *The Woman Hater* in 1877. The term was further popularized by other late nineteenth-century U.S. writers, such as Henry James, through their characterization of women who pushed the limits of acceptable decorum in male dominated society. For writers such as Reade and James, independent women who pushed the boundaries of women’s decorum and mobility threatened U.S. society. In this regard, it is not a coincidence that Daisy Miller tragically dies at the end of James’ novella. Though writers such as James define “New Womanhood” tragically, I argue that they are responding not to a late nineteenth century phenomenon, but rather to a century long movement that results in women’s independence and mobility. The progress of “New Womanhood” can be traced through journals nineteenth century middle-upper class women kept as passengers and wives/daughters who accompanied their husbands/fathers to sea.
To further understand how seafaring women redefined womanhood throughout the century, I open this chapter with a brief historical conceptualization of “New Womanhood” in the United States. On May 16, 1885, a poem entitled “The New Woman” by Adelaid V. Finch was published in the *Journal of Education*. The poem further elucidates society’s complicated views on women’s visible engagement in politics and the public sphere. The poem challenges women’s emerging independence in society and criticizes their absence from the home:

- Woman on the platform
- Woman at her club
- Woman in the magazine
- Woman at the hub.
- Woman and the ballot box
- Woman on some board
- Woman and the dress reform
- Woman’s her own lord!
- Woman – that’s the question
- Woman on the foam
- Woman all the world o’er
- Where’s woman in the home!

The presence of the poem in the *Journal of Education*, which aims to encourage conversation and discussion about issues in society and education, likely fostered a

---

24 *The Journal of Education*, first published in 1883, is an American journal that bridges the gap between the intellectual and the methodological to encourage dialogue between educators and policy makers (*American Journal of Education*).
debate about women’s education and their changing roles in society. The poem describes women’s further emergence into the public spaces of society. It notes women traveling, women who are visibly involved in politics, and women’s increased sense of independence. Further, the phrase “women on the foam” implies women’s accepted presence at sea as both passengers and sailors. Interestingly in this poem, there is no mention of men. Instead, it is a poem written by a woman about women. The first three stanzas of the poem positively illustrate the emergence of the “New Woman,” while the last stanza ends with the phrase “Where’s woman in the home!” which questions women’s roles and the impact they have on society. Though the last line of the poem asks a question, the poem ends with italics and an exclamation mark to emphasize the phrase “woman in the home!” The contrast between this line and the rest of the poem suggests that this line critiques society’s ambivalence about women’s evolving roles. The poem points to women’s presence in public spaces, the new opportunities they are afforded, and their independence, but it also highlights an anxiety associated with their shift from “Republican Mothers” to U.S. citizens and how it will impact U.S. culture. If women are not home to mold their husbands and raise their sons to be ideal citizens, who will perform this necessary work?

Many writers severely critiqued the emergence of the “New Woman” in the 1880s and the 1890s because she was seen, mostly by men, as challenging established gender relationships and the distribution of power. Yet, the emergence of the “New Woman” was also a direct result of a socioeconomic situation that began to arise in the late nineteenth century. By the 1880s and 1890s, many men waited to marry until they were financially secure and women also sought new economic opportunities for themselves.
As Lorale MacPike states, the socioeconomic situation of the 1880s caused women’s roles to shift which “led to greater education opportunities, new career choices, an expanded physical arena, and increased legal rights” (369). Their education and financial stability enabled women to become visibly independent as it placed “women in the world, not in the home” (370). By the late nineteenth century, women’s roles in society also began to change because of the new opportunities they sought for themselves. MackPike defines the “New Woman” as “a middle-class, youngish, single woman, typically a child of the bourgeoisie. She had some education and she was able to support herself…She had the means to dress well, and because she was not in the marriage market, she might choose to please herself about dress and companions” (371). The “New Woman” was a member of the middle or upper class and sought new opportunities because she – often thanks to financial help from her family – could afford to do so. “New Womanhood” was mostly limited to white middle-class women from financially stable families who could afford to educate and support their daughters.

Though critics of the “New Woman” saw women as challenging their roles in relation to their station in society, I argue her visibility in the public sphere was built upon women’s political and progressive work in the preceding generations. Throughout the nineteenth century, women engaged in politics and public society. MacPike further notes,

In the century preceding 1880, medicine, science, and derivatives of the idea of evolution, both social and biological, had all contributed to a normative, or prescriptive, theory about the nature of women-in-relation-to-society, which structured a discourse about women that controlled
women’s actual experiences – the way they could live their lives. The emergence of the New Woman in the 1880s and 1890s made both possible and required restructuring on that discourse as women’s lives began visibly to contradict the theory. (369)

While the concept of the “New Womanhood” garnered attention in the late nineteenth century as a result of changing socioeconomics, I argue that women renegotiated their roles in society throughout the nineteenth century. The spotlight placed on the “New Woman” drew attention to women’s presence and potential in society. If, as MacPike contends, women in the late nineteenth century had more opportunities, it was because women throughout the nineteenth century pushed boundaries and refused to be limited by their roles as daughters, wives, sisters, and mothers. For example, the antebellum women’s right movement clearly paved the way for the concept of “New Womanhood” at the end of the century. The writings and activism of women such as Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Susan B. Anthony, and Lydia Maria Child shaped how women and men thought about women’s roles and positions in society.

Within the last fifty years of scholarship, literary critics and cultural historians have drawn increasing attention to women’s writings, but the writings of women who went to sea in the nineteenth century still remain understudied. In my analysis of women’s maritime writings, I am interested in how women negotiated their roles and the expectations society placed on their gender performance as their mobility and independence increased in U.S. I argue that the journals middle-to-upper class women kept about their seafaring experiences offer us valuable information about women’s lived experiences and how they viewed their place in society. The presence of nineteenth
century middle-upper class women at sea illuminates both women’s mobility and confinement.

In this chapter I examine Lucy Kendall’s sea journal, published posthumously, about her voyage to California during the Gold Rush era (1852); Margaret Fraser’s unpublished sea log she kept aboard the Sea Witch as she accompanied her husband, Captain Frazier, in 1859; and Hattie Atwood Freeman’s narrative, *Around the World in 500 Days*, transcribed and published from the diary she kept while she accompanied her father, Captain Atwood, at sea from 1883 to 1884.25 I argue that these women, by “inscribing the daily” at sea, accurately depict women’s lives and show, through their relationships and experiences, how their roles progressed throughout the century.

While literary scholars and cultural historians, such as Hester Blum, Myra C. Glen, Brian Rouleau, and Paul Gilje have highlighted the importance of sailors’ journals and their sea narratives, women’s seafaring experiences and their journals – though recovered by cultural historians such as Joan Druett – have not received the critical, analytical attention that male sailors’ private and public writings have. For example, while William Reynold’s private journal has recently garnered critical attention, Lucy Kendall’s published private journal remains relatively unknown.26

---

25 Kendall’s sea journal, *Voyage to California: Written at Sea, 1852* was passed through generations of her family and published in 1998 by Huntington Library Press. Fraser’s sea log, kept aboard the Sea Witch is housed at the Phillips Library, an extension of the Peabody Essex Museum, located in Rowley, MA. Atwood’s narrative, though it takes place between January 1883 and June 1884, was not published until 1907. The version I use in this chapter was edited by Curtis Dahl and reprinted by Mystic Seaport Museum in 1999.

26 William Reynolds served as a mid-shipman during the Wilkes Expedition from 1838 – 1842. All officers were required to keep a “public” journal of their experiences, which Captain Charles Wilkes used to inform his written narration of the voyage that he presented to Congress. In addition to the public journal, Reynolds kept a “private” journal
Women’s journals in the nineteenth century highlight women’s lived experiences and how they viewed their relationships, roles, and place in society. These journals more accurately reveal the roles women played in society and how they engaged with the public, political discourse of their contemporary moment. Defining key terms in genres of personal writing, Judy Simons argues that the terms “diary” and “journal” are interchangeable. With the exception of Margaret Fraser’s sea log, I refer to women’s personal writings in this chapter as “journals” because scholars typically refer to sailors’ personal sea writings as journals. The act of keeping a record of daily events is not gendered, though the term “diary” in the twenty-first century is gendered to imply “feminine writings.” To avoid confusion, in my analysis of Margaret Fraser’s text, I refer to her text as her sea log because it is housed in the archives of the Phillips Library at the Peabody Essex Museum as the logbook of the Sea Witch.

Feminist scholars of the 1990s recovered women’s personal writings—journals, diaries, letters, autobiography, and memoirs—to re-examine their lived experiences in the nineteenth century. Suzanne L. Bunkers and Cynthia A. Huff argue that diaries/journals serve as a “significant part of everyday life, a valued form of autobiography, and an important record of historical place and time” (5). As autobiographical texts, journals inform literary scholars and cultural historians about women’s worlds in the nineteenth century. These texts not only detail women’s roles, their responsibilities, and their relationships but they also depict how they felt about their lives and how they viewed themselves. I argue that women’s journals, particularly their sea journals, illuminate their

detailing his own observations and opinions about sea life, which Penguin published in 2004.
own experiences as well as how they interact with individuals, situations, circumstances, and environment(s) that define their surroundings. In writing “privately,” in the sense that they are writing for themselves, these women define their lives by negotiating the expectations society places on them, and they also redefine society by critiquing or praising the performances of those around them. Paradoxically, at the same time that women’s journals are an inward reflection of their lives, Lynn Z. Bloom argues that in the nineteenth century, journals are public documents that were composed with an audience in mind. In the nineteenth century, journals were commonly shared with husbands, parents, children, siblings, friends, and circulated among members of the community. Bloom further states that like an actor, a nineteenth century journal-writer was “audience-centered” (24 – 25), and they supplied “sufficient detail for another’s understanding” (25). As private/public documents, journals are self-censored. Entries are composed to depict lives, but they are also edited to elicit an appropriate response from their reader – whether the response is one of sympathy, agreement, disagreement, praise, or reform.

Throughout this chapter, I examine women’s sea journals to demonstrate how women felt about their space and place in society and how they pushed against the limitations society imposed on them. In the journals women kept at sea, they demonstrate how they had to renegotiate their roles. These women are adaptable and display independence, ambition, and intuition. Women’s sea journals offer a glimpse into women’s actual experience in the nineteenth century and provide an alternative to a womanhood characteristically (and inaccurately) defined by submission and domesticity. Their journals revise the Age of Sail narrative to include women and demonstrate how
women actively participated in every aspect of U.S. life. Further, I argue that middle-class women who went to sea wielded some agency over the captain’s behavior because they were not wards of the ship and shared the captain’s class status. Women not only criticized the captain’s behavior, but they also sometimes successfully encouraged his transformation into a Christian gentleman at sea. To emphasize the agency women held in their positions at sea, I first open with a discussion of women’s “absent-presence” in sea narratives and how their absence from these narratives points to larger societal concerns. The shanty “The Mermaid” asks us to consider and re-evaluate women’s roles in society. Women in this shanty are an “absent presence” at sea, but as the sailors face their impending doom of shipwreck, they imagine their wives at home. The sailors’ wives occupy their husbands’/lovers’ final thoughts, and women’s presence in the shanty signals their importance in society. Finally, I analyze Kendall’s, Fraser’s, and Atwood’s maritime writings to show how women’s sea journals enforce appropriate decorum and how these women viewed themselves as civilizing agents at sea.

In my analysis of Kendall’s, Fraser’s, and Atwood’s texts, I contend that middle-to-upper class women who went to sea also depict their independence and mobility in their descriptions of their experiences. For many middle-class women, the sea was not a last resort or a hasty decision made to escape poverty, conviction, or imprisonment; rather, many nineteenth century middle class women consciously chose to go to sea. Their ability to retain their gender identity in the space of a ship without passing signals the privilege of their class status; their experience thus drastically differs from their working-class counterparts who passed as sailors out of necessity.
Before I begin my analysis of women’s sea journals, it is important to acknowledge women’s “absent presence” in traditional maritime writings. At first glimpse, women are absent from nineteenth century U.S. maritime texts, but a closer reading elucidates their presence in the shadows of texts. Consider, for example, Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick*. *Moby-Dick* is a novel about U.S. masculinity. Despite the novel’s philosophical complexities and incongruities, at the heart of the novel is Ishmael’s attempt to build community with his shipmates and readers. Though Captain Ahab’s wife is mentioned twice throughout the novel, she lingers as an absent-presence. The image of Ahab’s wife waiting for him on shore reminds readers of his humanity. In this portrayal, Ahab’s wife lacks agency and she remains a nameless widow. As the Pequod sails further from Ahab’s wife and child on Nantucket shore, Ahab descends further into his madness, which suggests that there is more to her role than just being a woman who laments for her husband. For example, when Ishmael first signs to ship with the Pequod, he asks Captain Peleg, the ship’s owner, about Captain Ahab’s disposition. Peleg refers to Ahab’s civilizing qualities through his wife:

> Besides my boy, he has a wife – not three voyages wedded – a sweet, resigned girl. Think of that; by that sweet girl that old man has a child: hold ye then can be any utter, hopeless harm in Ahab? No, my lad, stricken, blasted, if he be, Ahab has his humanities (79).

In Peleg’s description of Captain Ahab, he defines Ahab’s nature through his wife, who is a “sweet,” young “girl.” I argue that Ahab’s wife is a moralizing agent; as the distance between them grows, Ahab sinks without her influence to keep him afloat.
Ahab’s wife calls to mind the misconception of nineteenth century sea life: women remained behind, idle, as they waited for their husbands to return because the “homosocial” space of the ship was off limits to them. Stereotypically, when one thinks of captain and sailors’ wives in the nineteenth century, the image of Ahab’s wife, a woman pining on land for her husband, comes to mind. Laura Barton writes, “In our island tradition of maritime sons and sea shanties, we have been accustomed to the sound of wives lamenting, to women pining for men over the waves, and the essential idea of being separated by water” (Barton par 2). Barton suggests that women’s loneliness, abandonment, and worry defined their identities as seafaring women. Though women certainly did lament and worry about the fate of their husbands, lovers, and sons who went to sea, that worry did not define their experience as women.

Sea shanties often paint women as either passive widows who mourn the loss of their sailor/captain husbands, or brave and daring women who risked severe consequences and followed their lovers to sea. While few shanties depict women on shore as independent, their presence in the shanties nonetheless reflects the importance of women in maritime society. Despite their importance in society, few shanties illustrate women’s position on board ships at sea. The sea shanty “The Mermaid” is one of the few shanties in which a woman has power and agency at sea, which reveals women’s important place in maritime society:

It was a Friday morn when we set sail
And we were not far from the land

---

27 Catalogued in Francis James Child’s Child’s Ballads (1904), Ballad No. 289, the shanty dates back to the mid-eighteenth century.
When our captain, he spied a fishy mermaid
With a comb and a glass in her hand

*Oh the ocean waves do roll*

*And the stormy winds do blow*

*And we poor sailors are skipping at the top*

*While the landlubbers lie down below, below, below*

*While the landlubbers lie down below*

Up spoke the captain of our gallant ship
And a brave old skipper was he

"This fishy mermaid has warned me of our doom
We shall sink to the bottom of the sea"

Up spoke the first mate of our gallant ship
And a well-spoken man was he

"I have me a wife in Salem by the sea
And tonight she a widow will be"

Up spoke the bosun of our gallant ship
And a brave young man was he

"Well I've got a sweetheart at St. John's by the sea
And tonight she be weepin' for me"

Up spoke the cook of our gallant ship
And a greasy old butcher was he

"I care much more for my pots and my pans
Than I do for the bottom of the sea"
Then up spoke the cabinboy, of our gallant ship
And a nasty little lad was he
"I'm not quite sure I can spell mermaid
But I'm going to the bottom of the sea"

Then three times around spun our gallant ship
And three times around spun she
Three times around spun our gallant ship
And she sank to the bottom of the sea

In traditional maritime folklore, a mermaid is the sign of impending shipwreck or doom. Though the mermaid signals the crew’s doom, she also holds power and authority. Her presence suggests that she plays a powerful role in predicting the crew’s fate. The captain does not question that the ship will sink, and instead, he prepares the sailors for their impending doom. Interestingly, the sailors in the shanty also think of their wives on shore. Though they expect their wives to mourn for their loss, in mentioning their wives, the sailors signal the importance of women in their lives. The presence of the wives in this shanty is more about the sailors’ longing for their wives than it is about the women mourning for their lost husbands. The fact that sailors long for their wives at the time of their death suggests that women are powerful influencers who wield agency in their relationships and their lives. Sailor wives, who are absent from their husbands, must provide for themselves while their husbands are at sea and in the event of their death. The women are the survivors in this sea shanty, and their presence asks us to imagine their lives as sailor wives and to re-examine our understanding of women’s agency and power in the nineteenth century. Though a woman’s point-of-view is absent from sea in this
shanty, sailors’ wives play a powerful role, like Ahab’s wife, in shaping the values and beliefs of their husbands.

Most importantly, middle-and-upper class nineteenth century U.S. women played an important role in society as “civilizing agents.” In their sea journals, they present themselves as custodians of civic virtue who require their husbands, captains, and male passengers and children to adhere to the tenets of Christian gentility. Anita Duneer contends that a women’s presence at sea provided her with mobility. She writes,

Although the decision to embark on a long voyage reinforced the domestic ideals of marital love and duty, it opened a world of experience that, despite the restricted mobility of women on board the ship, presented new ways for them to imagine themselves outside the domestic sphere. (194)

Like Duneer, I argue that women’s presence at sea challenges cultural historians’ understanding of women’s roles within their “traditional,” private space. At sea, women and men occupy the same space, and women act visibly, publically, and assert their own agency. At sea, middle-class women possess power – because of their class position – that is denied to other members of the mariner community, such as sailors.

This empowerment is clearly evident in Kendall’s sea journal, which demonstrates how women, despite the limitations placed on their gender performance, are politically active and aware of their cultural moment. Throughout the narrative, Kendall notes how she influences men on board – both the captain and the passengers – to reform their behavior. For example, she critiques a male passenger’s support for the institution of slavery and the captain’s irrational and cruel behavior. In critiquing the performance of masculinity by white middle-class members of society at sea, Kendall, like Stowe, aligns
herself with humanitarian movements through her moral activism. In Fraser’s sea log, she expresses her autonomy and independence in her relationship with her husband. Throughout the journal, which she and her husband both write in, often responding to each other’s entries, Fraser details how she and her husband negotiate their roles in their marriage. The fact that her husband responds to her criticisms and concerns, even if the response is not always positive, demonstrates her agency and identity as an agent in their marriage. In Atwood’s sea narrative, she explains the new opportunities, such as navigation, that she is afforded at sea. She portrays herself as an active member of the seafaring community, which further demonstrates women’s abilities to participate in all aspects of society. Together, Kendall’s, Fraser’s, and Atwood’s sea narratives reveal how women’s roles shift as the century progresses. Specifically, the autonomy of women, such as Kendall and Fraser, demonstrate how women throughout the century paved the way for new opportunities for women, such as Atwood, at the end of the century.

Kendall wrote her sea journal during her voyage to California in 1852. To briefly summarize, Kendall accompanied her mother and younger sister as passengers in route to California to meet her father who had already established a home there for them. Though she never intended the narrative to be read by the captain, and it likely remained unread by him, the commentary she provides about his behavior was read by her family and friends, as historian Andrew Rolle notes in the preface to the journal. The commentary Kendall provides about the captain’s behavior suggests that she critiques his

---

28 My reading of Kendall’s sea journal is informed by Andrew Rolle’s introduction to the journal as well as scholars such as Joan Druett, Lisa Norling, Margaret Creighton, Basil Greenhill and Ann Giffard and their approaches to archival research and examining the importance of women’s sea writings and sea experiences.
performance of masculinity in an effort to define, for her readers, how men should appropriately act in spaces – such as the sea and the West – which are on the cusp of civilization.

Kendall’s sea journal begins with a brief description of her work at sea and how she renegotiates her space and place. She stresses her “domestic” activities and how her roles have not changed despite her new location: “I have determined to work at sewing etc. until dinner time, draw until six, and walk and talk in the evening; thus my time being divided and fully occupied, it will pass quickly and pleasantly” (56). Despite the atopic nature of the sea and ship life, Kendall asserts that her life at sea differs only mildly from the life on shore that she has temporarily left.29 Yet, the phrase, “I have determined,” suggests that Kendall negotiates her position within this space and that she chooses to continue her daily activities at sea as she would on shore. “I have determined” shows her intended audience that shipboard life will not change or influence her identity. By emphasizing her “domestic” activities, Kendall demonstrates her “correct” performance of middle-class femininity, despite her presence at sea and her decision to move West.

Kendall’s sea journal also reveals her engagement in U.S. politics. For example, in an early entry in her journal, Kendall notes that she is reading Uncle Tom’s Cabin and she empathizes with the slaves’ plight. The reference to Uncle Tom’s Cabin in her journal signals an awareness of and an involvement in the political concerns of her cultural background.

---

29 I borrow from Siobhan Carroll defines the sea as a “a space depicted as fundamentally antithetical to civilization” (15). I use the word atopic to describe sea/ship life because the sea is an uncivilized space that individuals (through their presence on ships that replicate Anglo-European society and class structure) attempt to civilize.
moment and a desire to contribute to the humanitarian movement. She writes, “Read *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* – enough to arouse the indignation of the whole world as regards that bane of America, slavery!” (56). In this passage, Kendall not only demonstrates her commitment to the abolitionist cause, but she is also aware of how the rest of the world views the U.S. because of the institution of slavery. The word choice “bane” suggests that slavery is not only distressing, but it is also a poison that is harmful to the nation’s reputation and to U.S. citizens. Kendall agrees with Stowe’s argument that Americans are corrupt because slavery is a corrupt institution.

Further, Kendall notes that she lends the novel to other passengers on board, which shows how she attempts to influence others about how they should feel about contemporary, political issues such as slavery. She writes that she shares *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* with Mr. Waterson, an individual from a slave state, in an attempt to morally persuade him that slavery should be abolished:

> Mr. John Waterson and I have had a remarkable argument on the subject of slavery, he being from Maryland, a slave state. he got quite excited; I offered him a peppermint-lozenge and we soon got into such a confused metaphysical state that we came out fast and firm on the North American Indians. (61)

The passage not only illustrates Kendall’s knowledge about events in the United States, such as abolition or the Trail of Tears, but it also demonstrates her political engagement. In lending Mr. Waterson her copy of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, she hopes that the novel will persuade him to change his opinions. When the novel fails to fully convince Mr. Waterson, Kendall uses her own voice to inform him about the injustices of the
institution of slavery. The comment “He got quite excited,” suggests that Kendall challenges Mr. Waterson’s views. It also further demonstrates that Mr. Waterson, despite Kendall’s position as a woman, values Kendall’s opinion during their conversation about slavery and respects her views. Kendall’s journal asks scholars to re-evaluate women’s nineteenth century roles as submissive and passive. Kendall is a bright, educated woman who is actively engaged in the political issues of her era.

As the voyage progresses and Kendall is further exposed to sailors, their working conditions, and the captain’s behavior, the direction of the journal shifts from her concerns about slavery to concerns about sailors, their ill-treatment, and the captain’s inappropriate behavior. In her journal, Kendall depicts the captain as a tyrant who uses violence to discipline his crew, and she notes that the violence is unwarranted and illegal. Her remarks on his behavior show that the captain refuses to act with compassion or self-restraint. For example, when the cook burns his soup, he cannot control his anger and reacts by flogging the cook. In the journal entry, Kendall notes that not only was the captain’s reaction inappropriate because of his position, but it was also illegal and an abuse of his power. She writes,

The captain being in no humor to be trifled with and having, as he said, a blacklist against the cook which was always ready to pay off – in a violent passion by way of keeping his threat – and being revenged on the wind at the same time – straightway dashed to the galley where he caused the poor old man to be tied by his hands to the rigging, and after summoning the sailors and boys as witnesses, beat him with a knotted rope. (88)
Here, Kendall’s entry remarks on the captain’s inability to adhere to the tenets of Christian gentility. He lacks compassion, he is unable to contain his anger, and he cannot control his passions. His actions do not reflect U.S. middle-class expectations of how manhood should be performed. Further, Kendall’s description notes that the captain called the sailors to witness the event, which shows that the captain used the cook’s punishment as a way to inappropriately demonstrate his power and authority at sea. Through the use of violence, the captain instills fear in his crew in an attempt to earn their respect and submission.

Kendall’s reflection on the event demonstrates the empathy she feels for the sailors, and she critiques the captain’s inappropriate display of authority and masculinity. Kendall notes that the captain can do as wishes without fear of consequences. Responding to the controversy surrounding the use of flogging to discipline sailors at sea, Kendall depicts the captain’s behavior as inappropriate and unwarranted.\footnote{Flogging sailors as punishment was a highly controversial debate among American citizens and legislature. In 1850, New Hampshire Senator Hale added an anti-flogging clause to the Naval Appropriation Bill in the attempt to completely ban flogging. While the practice was frowned upon, Congress did not abolish flogging entirely until 1862. See further, Valle, James E. 
Rocks & Shoals: Order and Discipline in the Old Navy 1800-1861. Naval Institute Press, 1980.} Further, she notes that the captain could not be persuaded to change his course of action, despite the passengers’ desire that sailors be treated better. Kendall suggests that the captain’s sole authority at sea is problematic and is not representative of U.S. society:

Such a heart-sickening and loathing sensation overwhelmed us, it seemed as though we were accessory to foul murder, and yet so complete is the authority of the captain that no one passenger or servant dare to move a
foot to prevent disciplining of the ship on pain of confinement, if not irons. Whatever may be the transgression, however unjust the treatment, there is not redress except at the end of the voyage. (88)

Kendall’s depiction of the captain’s cruelty echoes Dana’s criticism of Captain Thomson in *Two Years before the Mast*. Like Dana, Kendall draws attention to the captain’s abuse of power and suggests that his behavior does not appropriately reflect his position in society. The similarities between Dana’s and Kendall’s critique of sea captains elucidates how men and women both worked to advocate the welfare of others. Both accounts tarnish the reputation of the captain based on his inability to adhere to the ideology of the Christian gentleman.

The captain, as a member of the middle-upper class, is expected to act with gentility, and Kendall judges his actions as irredeemable. Shortly after Kendall details the captain’s rash behavior in the journal, she includes a stanza from Eliza Cook’s poem “Nature’s Gentleman” in her diary.\(^{31}\) In the poem, Cook questions gentility and who has access to it:

> Whom shall we dub as gentleman? The knave, the fool, the brute—
> If they but own full tithe of gold and wear a courtly suit!
> The parchment scroll of title line, the riband at the knee,
> Can still suffice to ratify and grant such high degree:
> But nature, with a matchless hand, sends forth her noble born,
> And laughs the paltry attributes of wealth and rank to scorn;

\(^{31}\) Eliza Cook was a nineteenth century English author and poet who was a proponent of women’s political freedom.
She molds with care a spirit rare; half human, half divine,
And cries exulting, ‘Who can make a gentleman like mine?’

The poem defines gentility through one’s decorum rather than their class status or wealth. It suggests that while wealth has the ability to change one’s appearance, it cannot change the individual’s behavior or their position in polite society. Instead, in “Nature,” the gentleman is defined as half-human and half-divine, which emphasizes the importance of the ideology of Christian gentility across the Atlantic. Further, Kendall’s familiarity with Cook’s poetry and her inclusion of the stanza in her journal suggests that Kendall aligns with Cook’s standpoints about men’s behavior and women’s freedom. In critiquing the captain’s behavior and referencing Cook in her journal, Kendall demonstrates her appropriate behavior and suggests that women, as civilizing agents, also play a powerful role in shaping politics.

In the journal, Kendall presents her awareness of and engagement with public, political causes. She argues about slavery and the Indian Removal Act, critiques the captain’s gentility and flogging, and empathizes with the sailors’ plight. She presents herself as an educated, independent young woman who is conscious of the controversial events surrounding her cultural moment. In writing the journal and sharing it with members of her community, such as family and friends, Kendall, subtly, pushes the limits of her traditional gender roles. In her journal, she expresses her own standpoints on these matters, which signals her autonomy as a woman. She uses the space of the journal and its circulation to persuade members of her community to accept her standpoints about contemporary, political issues.
Like Kendall’s sea journal, Margaret Fraser’s sea log also details her experiences at sea and her daily activities. Whether or not Fraser’s sea log was initially intended for an audience, Fraser’s husband reads the sea log during the voyage. Thus, Fraser’s tone shifts throughout the sea log as she attempts to modify her husband’s behavior. In her sea log, she directs specific commentary at him, which he replies to on its pages. Whereas Druett argues that Captain Fraser places expectations on how his wife should behave and obey, I contend that the sea log illustrates how men and women both negotiate their roles and gender performances to meet expectations. Fraser’s sea log is a unique record of the juxtaposition of “private” and “public” spaces and how she negotiates these spaces. Throughout the sea log, Fraser criticizes her husband’s behavior as a sea captain and attempts to mold him into a Christian gentleman. She uses her role as a woman and a civilizing agent to refine her husband’s behavior and express her own autonomy. The journal, however, serves as a form of communication between husband and wife. Fraser’s sea log not only documents how Fraser and her husband negotiate their roles at sea, but it also demonstrates the power that she holds in their relationship and how her husband’s behavior positively or negatively affects their relationship and the Sea Witch community. The fact that her husband reforms his behavior based on Fraser’s comments suggests that she occupies a unique position as a member of the Sea Witch’s community. Unlike sailors who would be reprimanded for criticizing a captain’s behavior, Fraser is not disciplined or punished for her critical assessment of her husband.
Like Kendall’s sea journal, Fraser’s sea log begins with a description of her work aboard the Sea Witch. Though Fraser, like Kendall, also occupies an atopic space at sea on the Sea Witch, which does not easily replicate the comforts of home, she describes the vessel through the metaphor of the home: “I find nearly the same routine of work, on shipboard, as we have on shore; every day brings its own work; and my poor husband has quite as much trouble and as severe trials with his men as one has with a house of servants” (3). The metaphor of the home is interesting for a number of reasons. First, in describing her work at sea, she uses the word “we” rather than “I,” which implies that she is part of the community on shore and that her diary is intended to be read by this network of kin. She does not go into the details about the daily activities because she assumes that her readers are familiar with her routine on shore. Similar to Kendall, she emphasizes that the new space she occupies has not changed nor challenged her identity. Second, Fraser converts the unfamiliar space of the ship into the familiar space of the home. On shore she is sure of her autonomy, place, and identity and through the metaphor of the home, she invokes the same agency she has on shore as a member of her community.

Further, and perhaps even more importantly, Fraser uses the metaphor of the home to describe her husband’s position at sea: “[he] has quite as much trouble and as severe trials with his men as one does with a house full of servants” (3). Interestingly, she compares the space of the ship with the space of the home and describes her husband’s role as captain. Here, he is the head of the household and she shows the captain/crew

---

32 I am indebted to Joan Druett’s archival research and examination of Fraser’s sea journal. Though my analysis examines the agency Fraser exerts in her sea log, Druett’s reading sparked my own interest in this text as well as the topic.
relationship as a domestic one – a relationship that she too, because of women’s
traditional authority in the home, can govern. In this description, there is no distinction
between the space of the home of the space of the ship or the work performed in these
two spaces. She highlights the similarities between the spaces and her adaptability from
shore life to sea life, which further challenges the ideology of separate spheres. At the
beginning of the narrative, Fraser shows that she easily transitions from one space to
another space. As the voyage progress, however, Fraser demonstrates her unease and
unhappiness at sea, suggesting that the transition is not as easy as she initially states.
Finally, Fraser’s comparison of sailors to servants demonstrates how sea hierarchy
replicates class hierarchy in U.S. society.

As captain, her husband ranks above his crew in terms of class position and
authority. Yet, the domestic image of servants implies that it is her husband’s
responsibility to manage, educate, provide for, and protect his crew. Since servants are
also considered members of the household in the nineteenth century, the comparison
implies a domestic relationship. Fraser’s metaphor of the home further places her
husband in a domestic role as the head of the household, which suggests that Fraser
expects her husband to perform his masculinity at sea as he would on land. For example,
when some of the sailors prove to be troublesome, Fraser describes how her husband, as
the head of the ship and household, quells the sailors’ behavior: “Some of the men are
disposed to be rather troublesome, one of them used very abusive language to George this
morning without any provocation whatever” (52). Here, Fraser asserts that her husband
must model appropriate behavior for his crew and discipline them appropriately as a
father with dignity, self-restraint, and control. Further, through the metaphor of the home,
Fraser signals that she not only expects her husband to adhere to the tenets of Christian gentility but to also emulate appropriate behavior for his crew to model.

At the same time, Fraser places expectations on her husband’s behavior, she notes that she also modifies her behavior to meet her husband’s expectations. Together, Fraser and her husband learn to renegotiate their roles and their relationship in the shared space of the ship. For example, at the beginning of the voyage, Fraser describes the “trick” her husband plays on her and her reaction to it:

I had a regular hoax played upon me this evening by my mischievous husband. While taking our usual walk upon the deck, he remarked it was singular how long the ropes remained heated after the sun went down, and requested me to feel, I took hold of one directly above my head; and my hand was covered in tar, a little grease which the steward gave me, however, soon took it all off, but he enjoyed a hearty laugh at my expense.

(7 – 8)

Here, the trick George Fraser plays on his wife is his attempt to bond with her and welcome her into the community of mariners. The trick demonstrates his, and the crew’s, acceptance of her at sea. Seafarers – captains, officers, and sailors – often played jokes on each other as a form of bonding, and Fraser’s acceptance of the trick shows her awareness of the importance of community at sea. Further, her appropriate response to the trick signals her ability to adapt to new situations. Fraser does not critique her husband’s behavior in this passage; instead, as the language in the passage denotes, Fraser happily reflects on the trick and her husband’s behavior. The word choice “mischievous,” for example, implies her husband’s playful disposition, and she ends the
passage with “he enjoyed a hearty laugh,” which suggests that the trick was amusing to both parties. In the passage, Fraser does not condemn her husband’s actions as inappropriate nor does she attempt to modify her husband’s behavior. Instead, Fraser adapts her behavior to meet her husband’s expectations. Her appropriate reaction to the trick also signals her understanding of the seafaring community and the importance of relationships at sea.

As the voyage continues and Fraser demonstrates security in her space and roles at sea, her sea log becomes increasingly critical of her husband. For example, on September 15th, about a month into their voyage, she reflects on an event that transpires between her husband and his chief officer, Mr. Hartness. Her husband and Mr. Hartness disagree about Mr. Hartness’ duties, which results in his temporary suspension. Fraser’s reflection on the event suggests that her husband acted inappropriately in his resolution to discipline Mr. Hartness. The entry is filled with Fraser’s regret that her husband did not successfully resolve the issue. Further, Fraser’s commentary on their disagreement shows that her husband’s action creates discord among the Sea Witch community:

An unhappy circumstance has transpired today; my husband and (Mr. Hartness) the chief officer, had some words that resulted in George suspending him from duty; I regret that anything of the kind should take place; confined as we all are in such narrow limits; and all brought so continually together I had hoped that the utmost harmony and kindly feeling would exist, but unlooked for events will occur in one little moment to mar all our bright hopes and fond desires. (9)
Fraser’s tone in this entry is one of disappointment and regret. She begins the entry with “An unhappy circumstance,” which depicts her feelings about the event. She describes the circumstance as “unhappy” because she is distressed about it. Though she does not explicitly blame her husband for the “unhappy circumstance,” Fraser describes her sentiments about the event, knowing that her husband will read her sea log. She anticipates that he will note her frustration about how the events transpired. Though Fraser does not state the cause of their argument, Captain Fraser’s decision to discipline Mr. Hartness by removing him from his duty, suggests that Captain Fraser likely felt that Mr. Hartness threatened his authority. Here, Fraser’s “utopian” vision of the Sea Witch community crumbles as her husband punishes Mr. Hartness. Her phrase, “I had hoped that the utmost harmony and kindly feeling would exist” (9) alludes to her disappointment in her husband’s inability to foster this idyllic community on the Sea Witch as captain. Instead, Fraser notes that the rift in the hierarchy between the captain and his first mate affects the entirety of the shipboard community. Fraser’s entry elucidates how her husband’s actions affect those around him.

Fraser is able to both comment on and challenge the captain’s behavior as his wife, and as his wife, she wields agency that sailors in society cannot access. For example, in Captain Tyng’s narrative Before the Wind, he explains how he reacts with violence to sailors who disagree or challenge his authority, in Tyng’s narrative, the sailors are unhappy with their meat because it is old. The sailors attempt to communicate their displeasure with their captain about how they are treated, and he responds with violence because he believes the sailors’ displeasure to be a form of mutiny:
At supper time, three or four of them came aft with a kid beef, and wanted to know if that was the beef they were to have. I asked Mr. Bixley what beef it was. He said it was the last of the barrel, he delivered. I told him to open a fresh barrel in the morning, and that they would have good beef. They went forward, we could hear them grumbling and I foresaw that there was to be trouble. We therefore armed ourselves, and I laid a boat’s tiller on the capstan in case I should want a club. It was not long before they came aft again, wanting to see the beef, evidently for the purpose of a row, as the sailors say, to try the officers. I caught up the tiller, and sprung at them. They started forward, getting two or three pretty good blows from the tiller. I heard no more about their beef, and they proved to be a good set of men as I ever had. (152)

From Tyng’s perspective, the sailors challenge his authority, and he rashly acts with force, presenting it as self-defense, before the sailors actually attack. Tyng, instead of recognizing that the sailors are disgruntled because of his failure to abide by the terms of their contract that likely stipulated “good beef,” fails to obey the terms of the contract and provide for his crew. He, however, blames the crew for the incident as he believes they challenge his authority. The crew likely submits, not because they respect their captain, but because they fear him. In this passage, Tyng demonizes the sailors in order to justify his behavior because his actions do not reflect his position in society, nor do they adhere to middle-class values. Tyng, likely recognizes that his actions are viewed as inappropriate by society, and he attempts to rationalize his behavior by depicting the sailors as ruthless and irrational.
The passage further demonstrates hierarchical boundaries at sea and a jack tar’s inability to defend his rights.

Fraser’s entry suggests that her husband has abused his power at sea, and she is unhappy with his treatment towards his crew. Whereas Fraser’s journal entry would be seen as mutinous and challenging to the captain’s authority if it were written by a member of his crew, Captain Fraser does not discipline or treat his wife unkindly because of the sentiments she expresses about the incident in this journal entry. Instead, as Fraser continues to communicate her unhappiness because of her husband’s behavior, he reforms some of his behavior to appease his wife, which suggests that unlike the sailors, who are viewed as the captain’s wards, Captain Fraser respects his wife and values her opinions.

In another entry that occurs shortly after the captain and chief officer’s disagreement, Fraser notes that her happiness at sea is dependent on her husband and his ability to make her content. In the passage, she describes how she feels homesick and longs for community because her husband’s actions do not appropriately foster a community at sea:

September 19: At about this time (4 ½ PM) four weeks ago my spirits were rather depressed parting from fond parents whose watchful care has been extended over me with twofold anxiety; sisters and brothers whose sincere affection I have fully realized; kind relatives and friends all anxious on my behalf; leaving a home, a happy home, that has sheltered me for long years in sickness and in health; where I have scarcely known a care and no sorrow; to roam the trackless waste of waters, with whom? –
One who is comparatively a stranger to me; for although we have been
married better than four years; still his constant absence from home has
left me no opportunity of studying his disposition; thoroughly. With little
observations I have made has prepondered [sic] in his favor; I know he
holds it in his power to make me very happy and contented? contended, or
on the contrary, most miserable; I have not the least fear of the result; in
my confidence of his integrity; and that God will grant him his reward is
ever my prayer. (13)

In this description, the metaphor of the home further comes undone as Fraser juxtaposes
her family and her home with her husband and the ship. She depicts her family as
protective and describes her close relationships with them at the same time that she
defines her husband as a “stranger.” The Oxford English Dictionary defines “stranger” as
an individual who “does not know, or is not known, in a particular place or community”
(“Stranger”). Fraser’s word choice of stranger in this passage implies that her husband is
the stranger, although she is the one who struggles to negotiate her space on the ship. Her
husband is known within the Sea Witch community, but she implies that she does not
know her husband as a member of the seafaring community. In this passage, Fraser
depicts how she struggles to negotiate her roles and relationships at sea. Here, she also
reveals that the transition from life on shore to life at sea is not as easy as she first
suggested it would be in the opening pages of her sea log.

Further, Fraser’s longing for her family, their protection, and shelter suggests that
she does not feel secure in her new space. In the passage, she blames her husband for her
unhappiness as she writes, “I know he holds it in his power to make me feel very happy”
(13). Though it might appear that Fraser grants her husband more power in their relationship, the sentence is a critique of her husband’s behavior and elucidates her agency in their relationship. By drawing attention to her unhappiness and placing blame on her husband, she critiques his behavior in an attempt to modify it. Fraser is aware that her husband will read the entry, and she uses the log to communicate her displeasure with him. She further notes her unease with her husband’s disposition, which highlights his inappropriate behavior and suggests that he does not always behave as a gentleman of his standing and class position should. Here, Fraser invokes her autonomy in the relationship by describing her disappointment in her husband’s character, and she also wisely acknowledges her husband’s agency in their relationship by giving him the power to remedy the situation. His reform as the voyage progresses shows that Fraser wields agency in their relationship.

As evidence of Captain Fraser’s reform as the voyage progresses, Fraser praises her husband’s genteel behavior in the sea log. His appropriate display of masculinity not only pleases his wife, but it also affects the Sea Witch community. By appropriately performing his masculinity to meet his wife’s expectations, he, as captain, also emulates appropriate gentility for his crew. For example, Fraser describes her husband’s amelioration from swearing: “I am highly gratified; for these two days I have not heard my husband use any bad language; would that he could have resolution enough to quit it all together, I am sure he would get along quite well; but it is very difficult to break oneself from old habits” (28). Here, Fraser praises her husband’s softer, more genteel actions. Her word choice, “I am highly gratified,” suggests that she positively influenced her husband to modify his language. Her husband’s improved language also signals his
realignment with middle-upper class society rather than his crew. Swearing, as Paul Gilje
notes, was common in the U.S. during the antebellum era, but it was often associated
with the working class. At sea, swearing was frequent and it signaled that an individual
was a part of maritime culture. Swearing was a specialized language that sailors learned
and adopted. Gilje notes, “Young sailors…learned to swear while aboard and did so to
assert their membership in the group” (29). Her husband’s improved language not only
demonstrates his reform of character, but it also separates him from his seafaring
community and the working class. The shift in his vernacular, and his wife’s approval,
suggests that he changes his behavior to accommodate his wife’s middle-upper class
values.

Yet, Captain Fraser’s written response to his wife’s praise in the sea log further
complicates this passage. After reading this entry, her husband writes the word
“Humbug” over her text:

Here, Fraser’s sea log functions as a shared space of communication and further demonstrates how Fraser and her husband negotiate their relationship. Fraser praises her husband’s genteel behavior and adherence to middle-class codes of conduct. The word “humbug” could imply that her husband does not feel worthy of his wife’s praise, and his response could simply mean “nonsense.” Yet, “humbug” has a double meaning and it is also a nautical term. In Two Years Before the Mast, Dana defines the term “humbug” as an individual who feels as if he is being kept at work for no reason: “the nautical phrase is ‘humbugged,’ no sloth could make less headway. He must not refuse his duty, or in anyway be disobedient…” (64). Captain Fraser’s use of the word “humbug” and his decision to write it directly over Fraser’s text challenges his wife’s authority. “Humbug”
portrays his feelings of ill-use because his wife places unrealistic expectations on his behavior. His response suggests that the pressure she places on him to reform is unwanted and unwarranted. Yet, he cannot be disobedient to his wife because her happiness depends on his successful performance of gentility. Further, by writing “humbug” in his wife’s sea log, Captain Fraser notes his displeasure with his wife’s agency and authority, which implies that she has autonomy and power in their relationship. Though the word “humbug” certainly contradicts her account of the matter, if Captain Fraser’s use of the word “humbug” was intended to make her laugh, his playful nature further demonstrates the respect he has for his wife. As Fraser notes his continued reform after this entry in her journal, her husband submits to her demands of decorum and reforms his behavior.

As a case study, Fraser’s sea log demonstrates some of the realities of nineteenth century marital relationships in the United States. In the sea log, Fraser depicts how she and her husband both negotiate their spaces and their roles to appease one another. Fraser’s sea log also elucidates her agency and autonomy in their relationship. Further, her presence at sea and her husband’s acceptance of her presence on the Sea Witch challenges scholars’ previous conceptions about nineteenth century women, their roles, and their relationships.

Like Kendall’s and Fraser’s sea journals, Hattie Atwood’s narrative Around the World in 500 Days challenges misconceptions of women’s roles and their identity in the nineteenth century.33 Though Atwood’s narrative also begins with a depiction of Captain

---

33 Joan Druett and Curtis Dahl both discuss the unique agency Atwood wields in this narrative, especially through her navigation. I add to their discussions by suggesting that
Atwood, her father, and emphasizes the importance of Christian gentility, Atwood pushes the boundaries of appropriate female decorum through her labor at sea, such as navigation, that her father encourages her to perform at sea. By writing the narrative, which details her seafaring career, Atwood shows that society should accept her behavior and autonomy as a woman because they are condoned by a male member of middle-upper class society who encourages her actions.

Atwood’s description of her father as a Christian gentleman is self-serving, but the description also signals the importance of gentility as middle-upper class women gain more independence and mobility near the turn of the century. She suggests that appropriate performances of masculinity positively influence society. For example, Atwood depicts her father’s position as captain as a guardian who encourages the moral development of his sailors: “It was Sunday, father asked the sailors to come into prayers…one thing father told the sailors was: that he had been to sea with captains who did not acknowledge the Sabbath after three leagues of water, but he should acknowledge it and wished them to” (36). Here, Atwood emphasizes her father’s adherence to the Sabbath to demonstrate that he is a Christian who abides by the tenets of Christianity, even at sea. At the beginning of her narrative, Atwood defines her father, as a captain, as different from the cruel captain’s depicted in sailor narratives. On the surface level, Atwood presents her father in a positive light to protect his and her family’s reputation. Her characterization of him as a Christian gentleman also demonstrates that if he, as the incarnation of society’s ideal image of masculinity, encourages his daughter to push her independence at sea and acceptance by the seafaring community advocates for women’s autonomy and participation in society.
boundaries of how society expects her to perform her gender, then society, as a whole, should be more accommodating to women, their independence, and their mobility.

Early in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, working class women who passed as sailors demonstrated women’s abilities to successfully perform the same hard, physical labor as men. Yet, middle-class women, as shown in Fraser’s sea log, struggled to negotiate their space at sea. Fraser depicts a complicated relationship with her husband in an effort to assert her autonomy and agency. Fraser’s sea log shows that despite the push-back she receives from her husband, she plays a powerful role in maintaining order and control at sea. Yet, in Atwood’s narrative, she does not need to renegotiate her space at sea. She actively participates as a member of the crew without disguising her womanhood or compromising her femininity. As a case study, *Around the World in 500 Days* illustrates society’s changing viewpoints about acceptable occupations and roles for women. Atwood’s narrative shows how women’s positions in society move from political, moral influencers who encourage ideal U.S. citizenship to independent women who, through education and opportunities, are welcomed participants in society. Atwood’s narrative displays how women at the end of the nineteenth century continue to dismantle to ideological barriers of femininity that women such as Stowe, Fraser, and Kendall first drew attention to in their texts.

At the beginning of Atwood’s narrative, she explains that she accompanied her father to sea because her older sisters are on the “marriage market” and she is not. In this description, Atwood demonstrates how marriage is a choice and both she and her sisters have autonomy in their futures:
The idea of taking a trip on a bark was first entertained by my two elder sisters, but when the destination of the bark was determined it meant so extended a trip they decided they could not be deprived so long of those tender affections that come to most young ladies of twenty and twenty-one years of age, thereupon they gave up the trip to remain near those affections. (22-23)

Atwood’s sisters are presented with the same opportunity and mobility, but they choose to remain on shore, which allows Atwood to take their place at sea. Further, Atwood’s presence at sea demonstrates that she is not on the marriage market and that there are opportunities available to her other than marriage.

The sea voyage also provides Atwood with an opportunity to learn more about seafaring and navigation. In fact, during the voyage, her father encourages Atwood to educate herself about the sea and navigation, and she receives a specialized knowledge that is unavailable to her on shore. She writes, “I had learned the advantage of experience over mere reading. I had studied about the Gulf Stream at school but now I was in it and father told me in a few minutes more than a book had in weeks of study” (35). This passage demonstrates that Atwood is an educated woman, but more importantly, it also shows how her father encourages her continued education. He supplements her education with real experiences and treats his daughter as an autonomous individual. Further, her education and experience push against the ideologies of “Republican Motherhood” and “the Angel of the House,” which assert that women should only be educated to raise their children as ideal citizens. Atwood’s narrative suggests that women should be educated to have access to opportunities, gain independence, and make new contributions to society.
Atwood further demonstrates that women’s mobility and independence in society are supported by men who, like her father, adhere to the tenets of Christian gentility. Atwood’s father encourages his daughter to learn navigation. She studies and learns from her father, and she passes the same test all sailing captains must pass to receive a steamship: “Father promised me a black dress if I would answer sixty-seven questions in navigation a sailing captain has to answer to get a steamship, and I did answer all questions” (41). Atwood’s successful completion of the exam shows that women, if given the opportunity, can perform the same work as men. Her father’s encouragement also suggests that society should encourage women to push the boundaries, assert their autonomy, and seek new opportunities. At sea, Atwood gains experience, a specialized knowledge, and equality. Here, she comes into her own womanhood under the direction and guidance of her father. Once Atwood passes the captain exam, she shares responsibilities with her father and becomes a member of the crew. Her main responsibility at sea is to navigate the ship in and out of port. She writes, “I got up at four thirty A.M. and ‘took the wheel’ out of the river while the men were busy snuggling things away at sea” (56). Atwood presents herself as a member of the seafaring community. In navigating the ship, Atwood participates as a member of her crew, and she relieves a burden from her father and the sailors so they can complete other necessary tasks.

The crew also recognizes Atwood’s participation as a member of the crew and their community, and they ask the captain’s permission to indoctrinate her into their fraternity. She explains that she is accepted as a member of the crew despite her gender and class position as the captain’s daughter. For example, when they cross the equator,
the sailors wish to play a joke on Atwood, which is the veteran sailors’ way of initiating young sailors into the mariner brotherhood: “We crossed the line. The sailors asked father if they could duck me when we cross the line. ‘Why she has crossed the line four times,’ said father. So their fun was spoiled” (42). The ritual of “crossing the line” is a ceremony, typically featuring “King Neptune,” that tests a new shipmate’s ability to handle difficulties at sea. The sailors, in asking permission to duck Atwood, signal their acceptance of Atwood as a member of their crew and community. Her contributions to the vessel and its community are rewarded by the crew’s acceptance of her presence on board. Their wish to “duck” her and indoctrinate her into their community demonstrates that she is an equal on board.

Unlike Kendall and Fraser who express their desire to return to the comforts and familiarities of shore life, Atwood dreads the end of her voyage because it signals the end of her seafaring career. She closes her narrative with the poem “Old Song,” which alludes to the restrictions and limitations Atwood experiences on shore compared to the freedom she has at sea:

A life on the ocean wave
A home on the rolling deep
Where the scattered waters wave
And the wind their revels keep!
Like an eagle caged, I pine
On this dull, unchanging shore
Oh, give me the flashing brine
The spray and the tempest roar.
Once more on deck I stand
On my own swift-flying craft
Set sail! Farewell to land,
The gale follows afar abaft;
We shoot thro’ the sparkling foam,
Like an ocean bird set free;
Like an ocean bird, our home
We’ll find on the sea

The land is no longer in view
The clouds have begun to frown
But with a shout from the vessel and crew,
We’ll say let the storm come down!
And the song of our heart shall be,
While the winds and the waters rave,
A life on the heaving sea.

A home on the bounding wave. (140 – 41)34

In the poem, the speaker finds a life at sea welcoming, and Atwood’s inclusion of the poem suggests that she identifies with the speaker. Prior to the inclusion of this poem,

---

34 Curtis Dahl, who edited the reprinted 1999 narrative notes that “Old Song” was likely printed in the Bangor Daily News, but the date is unknown (223). The Bangor Daily News is an American newspaper published in Bangor, Maine (Bangor Daily News). Authorship is unknown.
Atwood writes, “Our voyage has ended, likewise my career as a seawoman [sic]” (140). Atwood finds a home at sea, and the presence of the poem in her narrative suggests that she identifies with the persona. “Old Song” opens with the image of a caged eagle, which represents the limitations and entrapment that both the speaker and Atwood experience on shore. At sea, Atwood and the speaker are free from the restrictions of society, and like the speaker in the poem, Atwood craves adventure, experiences, and opportunities that she is denied on shore. Her inclusion of the poem at the end of the narrative signals her reluctance to return to shore and society’s expectations about her role and behavior in society. At sea, there are no limitations placed on her because of her gender, and her reluctance for the voyage to end suggests that she is unable to access this mobility and freedom on shore.

Atwood’s responsibilities at sea move beyond the traditional gender performance of “Republican Motherhood” and she demonstrates women’s ability to more actively participate in society and take on new roles. Unlike Kendall’s and Fraser’s sea journals, Atwood does not attempt to morally instruct her father or the crew, nor does she criticize their behavior. Instead, she depicts herself as a member of the crew and recounts her involvement in the seafaring community. The difference between Kendall’s, Fraser’s, and Atwood’s sea experiences show the shift and changes in society from one generation to the next. Women such as Kendall and Fraser paved the way for “New Woman,” such as Atwood, at the end of the century. Kendall’s and Fraser’s sea journals elucidate how women pushed back against society’s expectations that they be passive and submissive; their sea narratives also demonstrate how their labor and activism slowly influenced society. Combined, Kendall, Fraser, and Atwood demonstrate how women changed
society’s expectations of gender performance and challenged the ideology of separate spheres.

Like Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s “The Chivalric Sailor,” and Emma Cole’s *The Life and Sufferings of Miss Emma Cole*, Kendall’s, Fraser’s, and Atwood’s sea writings ask scholars to re-evaluate conventional notions of women’s experiences and roles in the nineteenth century in the United States. Women’s maritime writings define appropriate gender performances and display the consequences of failed performances. In doing so, women writers demonstrate their awareness and visible participation in the public, politics of their era. Further, these texts not only define American citizenship, but also model citizenship through women’s sea experiences. These writers contend that they, too, should be granted citizenship because they properly perform it. Finally, the analysis of women’s maritime writings shows how women roles progressed throughout the nineteenth century. The equality and respect women are afforded in their relationships and their welcome participation as member of the ship community signals their involvement in every aspect of society throughout the nineteenth century.
In one of my final American literature seminars as an undergraduate student, the semester ended with Sena Jeter Naslund’s best-selling novel, Ahab’s Wife, Or, The Star Gazer (1999). My classmates and I, bound for graduate school, scoffed at the presence of contemporary fiction on our syllabus. My professor, frustrated with our apathy for the novel, remarked, “Remember, things are always popular for a reason.” His parting words have since reshaped my approach to popular fiction and my appreciation of non-canonical literature: Why is fiction, such as Ahab’s Wife popular, and what does it do?

Ahab’s Wife and Disney’s Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl (2003), both released near the turn of the millennium, are set in the past and feature strong, independent women who choose their own paths. Naslund’s novel and Pirates of the Caribbean rewrite eighteenth and nineteenth century history and offer women a place within it. Yet, as pieces designed and composed to meet the expectations of early twenty-first century audiences, the popularity of these texts results from how they successfully revise eighteenth and nineteenth century gender performance to meet the expectations of their audience. Ahab’s Wife and Pirates of the Caribbean, I contend, present an ideal vision of womanhood for the cultural, historical moment in which they were produced.

I pair Ahab’s Wife and Pirates of the Caribbean because they both, in their own unique ways, rewrite popular, cultural narratives. I am intrigued by how Ahab’s Wife and Pirates of the Caribbean cast women in powerful roles. Una (the protagonist and narrator in Ahab’s Wife) and Elizabeth Swann (Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black
Pearl’s only female lead) are both placed front and center and are the driving force of the novel and the film. First, I am interested in Una’s and Elizabeth’s representations as seafaring women who un/successfully pass and how their seafaring and passing not only enhance the plot but also elucidate their character development. I am also curious about if and how these strong, female leads contribute to the success and popularity of Ahab’s Wife and Pirates of the Caribbean. I argue that they do. Secondly, since both texts revise U.S. (or Anglo-American) history to include women, I am interested in the characteristics of femininity that are not only emphasized but are projected for contemporary audiences to model. If Ahab’s Wife and Pirates of the Caribbean are a rewriting of the past, they are also a reflection of the present.

Before I begin my analysis of Ahab’s Wife and Pirates of the Caribbean and how they rewrite cultural narratives, I open with a brief analysis of Paul and Storm’s sea shanty “The Captain’s Wife’s Lament,” released in 2007, as it also revises how sea shanties represent women on shore. In traditional sea shanties, women lament the loss and absence of their sailor lovers and husbands. In Paul and Storm’s humorous rewriting of the “Sailors’ Wife’s Lament,” they flip the narrative and the captain’s wife laments her husband’s return to shore:

The ship sailed into harbor
After fifteen months at sea
The captain hit the tavern
With his crew of fifty-three
After drinking up their pay
They staggered through the town
But all the inns and public houses
Turned the sailors down
The captain said ‘Fear not, me lads
You can come with me
I live jus’ round the corner
And you can all stay for free’
But when the captain’s wife awoke
Upon the break of day
They saw you could hear her wailin’
Clear to Bot’ny Bay
She said there’s
Seamen all around my bed
And seamen on the floor
Seamen in the bathroom
And behind the closet door
There’s seamen in the fireplace
And seamen in the hall
The living room is carpeted
With seamen, wall to wall
There’s seamen in the entryway
And seamen on the stair
And worst of all, there’s even seamen
In me underwear
There’s some behind the larder
And beneath the table too
I do believe your seamen
Got in my Irish stew
There’s seamen here in front of me
And seamen in the rear
My God – there’s even seamen
Hanging from the chandelier
There’s seamen on the windowsill
And seamen in the yard
The seamen even left a stain
Upon the Saint Bernard
Although I am a patient wife
‘Tis more than I can bear
To wake up in the morning
With your seamen in my hair
I ne’er do wish to see thee
Darken upon my door
So clean up all your seamen
And come round my way no more
So clean up all your seamen
And come round my way no more!35

The “Captain’s Wife’s Lament” cleverly calls attention to the stereotypes associated with sailors. In the first two stanzas, the sailors are described as wreaking havoc on shore after the conclusion of their fifteen-month journey. They are depicted as nineteenth-century evangelical society’s worst nightmare. Paul and Storm rely on stereotypes associated with sailors to convey the humor in the shanty. Sailors lack temperance, they are unable to act with responsibility or propriety, and they remain dependent on their captain after the voyage, even though they are no longer contractually obligated to adhere to his authority. Although the captain participates in the sailors’ debauchery, he continues to feel responsible for his crew and their wellbeing. In the shanty, the captain clearly values the relationships he has formed his crew and his membership in the community of mariners. The captain’s desire to house his inebriated sailors reinforces the importance of homosocial relationships between men at sea. On shore, the captain attempts to replicate the bonds formed at sea and his duty to provide for his wards. The overwhelming presence of the sailors in the wife’s home and the many sexual innuendos in the sea shanty reinforces the heterosexual space of society. Yet in captain’s wife’s rejection of these innuendo’s and the sailors’ presence in her home, she demonstrates agency and independence as she asserts they are not welcome in her home.

The sea shanty departs from traditional stereotypes when the captain’s wife appears in the third stanza. The wife is not submissive nor passive, and she does not hide her disdain from her husband. The wife “laments” because of her husband and the

sailors’ presence in her home. She recognizes that her husband is loyal to his crew and not her, and she laments that he cannot separate sea life from shore life. Their relationship collapses when her husband fails to recognize her authority and position of power within the home; the wife defends herself, acts with agency, and demands that her husband leave and “come round my way no more!” Here, she effectively rejects the bawdy innuendos, insisting that she will not sleep with the sailors (or her husband) in terms of sexual relationships or allowing them into her home. In the “Captain’s Wife’s Lament,” the wife asks us to re-examine our understanding of women’s agency and power in the twenty-first century. The captain’s wife is not reliant on her husband; she casts him out of their home, which further illustrates her independence. The “Captain’s Wife’s Lament” depicts women’s agency in society, in her relationships, and in the public and private spaces she occupies.

“The Captain’s Wife’s Lament” further reveals how contemporary texts rewrite women’s narratives in the nineteenth century to appeal to twenty-first century audiences. Like “The Captain’s Wife’s Lament,” Naslund’s Ahab’s Wife reexamines the status and position of captains’ wives in society. Liedeke Plate contends that Ahab’s Wife is a novel written by a woman for women. Naslund casts nineteenth century women as strong, independent, and autonomous in an attempt to appeal to a twenty-first century female-based readership.36 Ahab’s Wife relies on Moby-Dick’s cultural and canonical status and

36 Other notable scholars who discuss Ahab’s Wife include Tom Machie’s article “Ahab’s Wife, or The Star Gazer, A Wider/Deeper View of Melville’s Tragic Hero and His Times” (2001), Mazur Zgymunt’s book chapter “The Purpose of Art: Sena Jeter Naslund’s Ahab’s Wife” (2004), and Brigit Spengier in her book Literary Spin-Offs: Rewriting the Classics – Remembering the Community. Like Plate, these writers position Naslund’s novel and Una in relation to Moby-Dick. Though Moby-Dick is essential to
Naslund’s rewriting of *Moby-Dick* gives women a voice. *Moby-Dick*, as Jeffrey Inkso notes, has an “abiding presence throughout contemporary culture, high and low” (20). To further elaborate on Inkso’s claim, the novel, and especially Captain Ahab, has a contemporary, cultural footprint in the United States; even those who have never read *Moby-Dick* are familiar with Captain Ahab’s reputation and *The Pequod’s* demise. Plate argues that Naslund’s rewriting of *Moby-Dick* “looks into women’s writing to form a cultural recall that is directed at remembering differently, challenging the canon, yet inscribing it” (132). As Plate further suggests, the novel fictionalizes relationships with “historically real and imaginary” (138) women to remind readers that “there were such people back then, and it also arouses these women within the purview of cultural memory” (138). Naslund, by rewriting *Moby-Dick* to include women, speaks back to the canon and advocates for women’s literary inclusion and representation in society.

Naslund’s rewriting of *Moby-Dick*, I argue, does more than advocate for women’s literary inclusion in the canon. Naslund casts her protagonist, Una, as a strong, fiercely independent woman who challenges the “Angel of the House” and “True Womanhood” ideologies. Further, she places Una in the same circles as Margaret Fuller and Maria Mitchell. Naslund breathes new life into these women and re-awakens their legacy; her characterization of such female characters demonstrates how women played multiple roles in the United States during the nineteenth century. Una’s close friendship with Margaret Fuller throughout the novel further suggests that Una prospers because she does not allow society to define her femininity and how she should act as a woman. Among Naslund’s agenda, I focus my analysis on Una and how she asserts agency independent of Ahab or Ishmael.
numerous philosophies, Fuller believed that women should not limit themselves to stereotypical gender roles and that they should not rely financially on their husbands. Fuller’s presence in the novel and Una’s close relationship to her highlights the importance of female relationships and it functions a reminder to twenty-first century women that they also make multiple and important contributions to society.

In Naslund’s novel, Una is her own woman. She is not a “New Woman;” she does not attempt to remake herself or remodel society. She simply chooses her own path as she sees fit. Even Una, who is cast as Ahab’s wife, is not limited to her roles as wife, mother, and daughter. The novel pays homage to women like Fuller as Una forges her own path and reinforces the multiple roles and contributions women make in society. If the novel re-awakens independent women from the past, Una and the women in the novel are also a reflection of the present. The success of the novel suggests that Naslund’s readers identify with Una, the challenges she faces, her experiences, and how she negotiates her relationships and position in society.

Though there are multiple moments to point to in Ahab’s Wife that support my thesis that Ahab’s Wife is popular because of how Naslund crafts nineteenth century characters who perform womanhood to meet the expectations of a twenty-first century female readership, I am most interested in Una’s decision to pass as a sailor and the relationships she forges with Kit and Giles, two young sailors who discover her passing. Una’s passing demonstrates her mobility and her negotiation and performance of womanhood. Further, Una’s passing raises interesting questions about her relationship with Kit and Giles behavior and what their presence means in the narrative.
First, Una’s passing depicts her mobility and grants women the opportunity to
decide their place and space in society. Una decides to pass after she learns of her
mother’s miscarriage; the loss of her mother’s child impacts Una and how she views
women’s roles in society. Directly after learning of her mother’s miscarriage, Una writes,

I wept. So this is what it came to! For the first time I felt that life was a
cheat! My mother robbed! … Never while I was at the Sea Fancy did I sit
down at the table with my sisters. I feared hearing more stories, uniquely
female, uniquely painful. I wanted shed of such stories. I wanted my own
life. And I wanted it to be different. (142)

Una’s decision to pass as a sailor is not a rejection of motherhood or traditional women’s
roles in society. Instead, her passing is a recognition of women’s pain and suffering and
her attempt to build a life that is free from such loss, pain, and hardship. Through her
passing, Una attempts to rewrite the narrative of women’s hardships as she states, “I
wanted shed of such stories” (142). Her passing offers an alternative to women. The
novel does not define womanhood as motherhood; it acknowledges the reasons women
may choose not to have children and suggests that there are other “uniquely female”
experiences available to women.

In fact, Una’s passing as a cabin boy is a “uniquely female” experience. The
experience is one of anxiety and fear of discovery and depends on Una’s successful
performance of her seafaring identity. Though men also cross-dressed and passed for
various reasons in the nineteenth century, the majority, although not all, of these passings
were temporary. A woman’s passing at sea, however, is a sustained performance as
voyages typically lasted a year or longer. To successfully pass, Una must negotiate her
feminine and masculine attributes; in doing so, Una rewrites her history, redefines her
gender, and renegotiates her identity. Una crafts her seafaring identity from the materials
and resources that are available to her. From her own experiences, she rebuilds her
identity. For example, Una’s use of her navy skirt as material for her sailor trousers,
symbolizes how Una reuses aspects of her past to remake her identity: “I also used the
scissors to cut two other pairs of trousers and their lining, using the bought ones as a
pattern, from my navy dress” (143). If clothing is an outward expression of identity,
Una’s repurposing of her skirt suggests that womanhood is “not one size fits all” and,
instead, encompasses many different experiences.

Una, by wearing men’s clothing, is free to define womanhood through her own
terms. She describes the act of passing as liberating, and through her disguise, she pushes
back against societal expectations of how she should perform her womanhood. Una
writes, “I found a red cap in the street, with a dusty footprint on one side, but I took it as a
good omen, brushed it off, and put it on my head. How light and free I felt with short
hair!” (143). In cutting her hair, she detaches herself from the expectations that society
places on women. The sailor costume provides her with mobility and she is no longer tied
to people, place, space, or traditional roles.

While appearance is an outward indication of how Una performs her womanhood,
Naslund also defines womanhood through Una’s characteristics. Una is gentle and
nurturing as well as independent, intelligent, and brave. Though these are also
characteristics of women in the nineteenth century, such as Margaret Fuller, Una
emboldens these characteristics to appeal to Naslund’s female readers. Readers see Una
reflected in their own identities and performances of womanhood. For example, when
Una reveals her identity to Kit and Giles, they question her negotiation of masculinity and femininity. “‘Are you male, now?’” Giles asks (191). To which Una responds, “No, I am purest female. Virginal, virtuous, and…and…voluptuous” (191). Here, Una asserts her sexuality as female and defends traditional notions of femininity. “Pure female” implies that Una’s gender remains unchanged despite her passing. Further, the word choice “voluptuous” implies that she sees herself as sexually attractive as a woman. Una implies that she can be both virginal, virtuous, and desirable, and perhaps views her purity as the characteristic men find most attractive about her identity.

Yet men contribute to defining Una’s femininity, but they do not emphasize her purity or virtue as her most attractive qualities. In response to Una’s definition of femininity, Giles offers an alternative to how Una defines herself and her performance of womanhood: “‘You are bold, inventive, unconventional, and…ambitious’” (191). In Una’s response, she abides to the tenets of “True Womanhood” to assert, that despite her passing and deviance from nineteenth century expectations of womanhood, she retains her status as a woman. Giles’s (and Kit’s) acceptance of Una’s passing and their assertion that as a woman she is bold, inventive, unconventional, and ambitious suggests that these are qualities to be admired and contribute to identity as a woman. For Naslund’s contemporary readers, this redefinition of “ideal” womanhood affirms that qualities of independence, agency, and bravery are attractive characteristics for women to possess. At the end of this exchange with Kit and Giles, Una concludes, “Euclid. I am your equal” (191). The reference to Euclid, an ancient Egyptian mathematician who presented geometry as an axiomatic system, suggests that Una’s equality to Kit and Giles is self-evident and unquestionable.
Though Kit’s and Gile’s acceptance of Una’s presence at sea and their acknowledgement of her as their equal is presented as positive in the novel, Una, in the early stages of her character formation, is too dependent on these male characters. Though Una makes the decision to pass at sea and passing provides her with mobility, she ships on the same ship as Kit and Giles. Kit and Giles, whom she knew prior to her passing, represent safety and security. Consciously, Una knows that if she fails in her performance as a seafarer, Kit and Giles will protect her from malicious members of the crew. Throughout her passing, Una relies on Kit and Giles to keep her secret, protect her, and defend her. I argue that it is only after Kit and Giles are removed from the novel that Una further explores womanhood on her own terms.

As an example of Una’s dependence on Kit and Giles, Una relies on them for her own survival when their ship, The Sussex, is attacked by a rogue whale. Kit and Giles take on leadership responsibilities and prepare the lifeboats with resources for survival. When the crew runs out of food, Giles and Kit are the ones who decide that cannibalism is the best course of action to ensure the survival of many opposed to none: “We decided. They said. Why, what could we even use as lots? ‘I have paper, Captain.’ Giles. ‘Let it be on your head” (224). Here, the “we,” although collective, refers to Kit and Giles. They propose the grotesque sin of cannibalism, and the captain, who lacks agency and authority in this situation, succumbs to Kit and Giles and Giles is selected to fill the captain’s absence: “He [the captain] tosses the saber the length of the boat to Giles, who catches it and stands” (225). In the act of passing the saber to Giles, the captain also passes his responsibility to him. In this moment, Giles comes into his manhood, and the survival or murder of the crew is both his decision and responsibility. Whereas Giles and
Kit are active participants in the act of cannibalism and murder, Una is not involved as she states: “Someone releases my wrist. I get to chew my paper. Someone puts a finger in my mouth. I suckle. I know. I will always know. I am drinking blood” (225). The word choice “someone,” implies that Kit and Giles are responsible for Una’s survival. Here, Una lacks the agency and confidence in her performance of womanhood to take on a leadership.

Giles’ suicide and Kit’s madness after Una, Kit, and Giles are rescued from sea, demonstrates their inability to cope with the consequences of their behavior, but it also forces Una to take responsibility for her future actions and participation in society. Kit’s madness suggests that his life is in “dis-order” and disarray, and he is unable to make sense of the world of his place within it after his experience. Una’s marriage to Kit signals her own disarray, and she cannot find meaning in her own life while she is dependent on Kit and Giles. In the annulment of the marriage, Una is free to re-order her life and attempt to make sense of her own womanhood. She must learn to support herself and navigate Nantucket society alone. The presence of Kit and Giles in the novel warns twenty-first century female readers about the downfalls of second wave feminism. Una’s passing shows that women have the mobility and ability to perform multiple roles in society, but it also suggests that women should craft their own identities and assert their agency through uniquely female experiences. After the removal of Kit and Giles from the narrative, Una finds independence through womanhood, she creates female networks (with Maria Mitchell and Margaret Fuller), and forms a community with the other women in Nantucket. Her identity is not defined by masculine approval of her
actions, but rather through her own embodiment of womanhood and the agency she finds as a widow, wife, and mother.

The absence of Kit and Giles from the narrative enables Una becomes her own woman. After her marriage to Kit, Una marries Ahab and later Ishmael. These relationships however, do not limit Una or her involvement in society. In her marriage to Ahab, he provides for her financially which allows her the freedom to travel and to invest in enterprises such as the Try-Pots and petroleum gas. During her marriage to Ahab, her widowhood, and her relationship with Ishmael, Una defines her identity through the female friendships she forms with Margaret Fuller and Maria Mitchell. These women inspire Una, and, she imitates the independence and autonomy they display. The womanhood Una ultimately models in Ahab’s Wife involves motherhood, sisterhood, and widowhood, but it also includes independence, autonomy, and participation in society. Una shows that women can be daughters, wives, mothers, and lovers but they are also capable of being sailors, thinkers, transcendentalists, astronomers, and entrepreneurs.

Like Ahab’s Wife, Pirates of the Caribbean also rewrites a popular, cultural narrative of piracy and women’s place at sea. The film relies upon the popular imagination of piracy and rewrites stereotypes associated with pirates as hyper-masculine. Isabel Karremann contends that the eighteenth century pirate is a transgressive figure that pushes the boundaries of appropriate masculine performances (6). In Pirates

37 Scholarship on Pirates of the Caribbean tends to focus on either theatrics or cinematography, such as Caroline Cook’s “Sequelizing Spectatorship and Building up the Kingdom: The Case of Pirates of the Caribbean, or, How a Theme-Park Attraction Spawned a Multi-Million Dollar Film Franchise” (2010) and Claire Hines “Playmates of the Caribbean: Taking Hollywood, Making Hard-Core” (2012), and Johnny Depp’s performance and the gendering of piracy, such as Anne Peterson’s “ ‘You Believe in Pirates of Course…’: Disney’s Commodification and ‘Closure’ vs. Johnny Depp’s
Johnny Depp’s performance of Captain Jack Sparrow blurs the binaries between hyper-virility/effeminacy and British loyalty/treason. Viewers are attracted to Depp and his character because, as Heike Steinoff notes, “Captain Jack Sparrow displays a hybrid, fractured and fluid identity” (par 9). The film revises pirates as a stock caricature. Though piracy is still a performance in *Pirates of the Caribbean*, the film individualizes pirates, such as Captain Jack Sparrow, and demonstrates how pirates straddled the threshold of normative/deviant behavior. The pirates’ performance in Disney’s film mirrors the liminal space they occupied in eighteenth century society. While scholarship on the film critically examines masculinity and performance, Elizabeth Swann’s role is often neglected. It is important to remember that the film also places a woman within this world of piracy. Her presence in the film further challenges gender performance and gender roles.

In *Pirates of the Caribbean*, Keira Knightley’s character, Elizabeth Swann, is the only female lead in the film. As film critic Elvis Mitchell acknowledges, director Gore Verbinski places Knightley “at the center of the of the film” (par 3). In his review, Mitchell argues that the film sexualizes Knightley by objectifying her as a woman on the cinematic stage. In his review, Mitchell asserts that Knightley is “confident in her movement” (par 4), which makes her “all the sexier and alluring” (par 4). Yet, he fails to recognize the importance of Elizabeth Swann’s role in the film, why she is placed front and center, and why Knightley was cast to fill this role. In his critique of the film,
Mitchell presents Knightley as a sexual object whose presence on the screen is only intended for the amusement of the audience looking at her body and movements. Yet, despite Knightley’s ability to draw male viewers to the film, she is more than just a “pretty” actress in *Pirates of the Caribbean*. In her performance of Elizabeth Swann, I argue that Knightley projects appropriate femininity for her female viewers to model. Knightley plays a character whose behavior, as the film progresses, deviates from accepted, cultural norms. Knightley’s performance depicts a young woman’s coming-to-age narrative as she develops from a character whose identity is defined by male expectations to a character who comes into a womanhood defined by her own terms.

*Pirates of the Caribbean* opens with Elizabeth singing the opening verse to the shanty “A Pirate’s Life for Me,” which is loosely tied to Robert Louis Stevenson’s “Dead Man’s Chest” from *Treasure Island* (1881):38

> We pillage, we plunder, we rifle, and loot  
> Drink me up hearties, yo ho
> We kidnap and ravage  
> And don’t give a hoot  
> Drink me up hearties  
> Yo ho, yo a pirate’s life for me  
> We extort, we pilfer, we filch, and sack  
> Drink me up hearties, yo ho  
> Maraud and embezzle and even high-jack  
> Drink me up…

---

38 Disney released the theme song composed by George Burns in 1967.
The shanty frames the narrative as Elizabeth’s voice is first softly heard and crescendos as the screen fades from black, to fog, to the ship, to her body. Though Elizabeth is surrounded by men throughout the movie, her voice is the first voice viewers hear and her body is the first body viewers see. It is important that we hear her voice before we see her body. Her voice and the shanty reveal Elizabeth’s desire to deviate from her traditional role in society. Elizabeth, in singing about pirates – individuals who deviate from normative culture and challenge the status quo in society – signals that she desires a life that departs from society’s expectations of gender and how she should perform her womanhood. Within the first few minutes of the film, the audience learns that Elizabeth is a young woman who is denied adventure and independence, which she desperately craves.

Despite the spectacle that is Captain Jack Sparrow, portrayed by Johnny Depp, *Pirates of the Caribbean* is Elizabeth’s coming-of-age narrative. The film is a rewriting of *Treasure Island* in which Elizabeth replaces Stevenson’s protagonist Jim Hawkins. If *Treasure Island* is a narrative about Jim Hawkins entrance into manhood, *Pirates of the Caribbean* portrays how Elizabeth Swann comes into her own womanhood. Like Jim, Elizabeth is raised in a world without a model; Jim lacks a father and Elizabeth’s mother is absent from her narrative. Her world is controlled by men who place restrictions on her appearance, behavior, and desires. For example, early in the film, Elizabeth’s father, Governor Swann (portrayed by Johnathon Pryce) gifts her with a new dress from London. Suspicious, Elizabeth asks, “May I inquire as to the occasion?” To which her father responds, “Does a father need an occasion to dote upon his daughter? [pause] Actually, I, uh, I had hoped you might wear it to the ceremony? [pause] Commodore Norrington as
he is about to become.” Though the dress is presented to Elizabeth as a gift, her father has selected it for her just as he has selected her future husband, Commodore Norrington. The beautiful dress represents Elizabeth’s position in society at the beginning of the film: she, like the dress, is an ornament. Elizabeth, at first, gushes at the beauty of the dress, but the dress also constricts her as she struggles to breathe. The dress limits her movements and the laborious breathing she experiences while wearing the dress represents her suffocation in society. She is only able to breathe again once Captain Jack Sparrow rescues her and removes her corset, suggesting that piracy, although condemned by the British government, is an alternative that can grant Elizabeth the independence she desires.

Yet, even in the scene when Jack Sparrow removes the corset, she is a pawn traded between men. Elizabeth, because she is a desired object, is a means of Jack Sparrow’s escape. When he flees, she is thrust into the arms of her father and her intended-future husband. It is not until the pirates of the Black Pearl attack the port and search for Elizabeth that she wields agency over her own life. She passes as Elizabeth Turner, a maid in the governor’s house and the wife of the local blacksmith Will Turner, and demands a parley with the pirate captain, Barbossa. Not only do the pirates agree to the terms of the parley, but as parley is also the French word “to speak,” Elizabeth’s voice is heard. She is sophisticated, educated, independent, and courageous. I argue that in this moment, which occurs early in the film, Elizabeth exemplifies the qualities of ideal womanhood for twenty-first century viewers.

The parley with Captain Barbossa is a defining moment for Elizabeth even though it results in her kidnapping and imprisonment. When she is rescued by Will Turner and
Jack Sparrow’s crew of pirates, she does not retreat into submission. She becomes a seafarer, a pirate, and a valuable member of the crew. She chooses her own path and uses her position in society as an “ornament” to her advantage. For example, in Jack Sparrow’s infamous “But why is all the rum gone” scene, Elizabeth burns the rum on their marooned island because she knows the entirety of the British navy is searching for her. When it becomes obvious to her that Jack Sparrow cannot and will not provide a means for their escape, Elizabeth crafts her own rescue, using a return to her society as a way to rescue Will. She will not be a bystander as the man she loves is captured and executed by the pirates. In this scene, she is fierce, determined, and selfless. As it becomes clear to her that her father and Commodore Norrington will not listen to her pleas or take her efforts to rescue Will seriously, she states, “Do it as a wedding present for me.” Here, she chooses marriage to a man she does not love in order to save the one she does. She is the means of Will’s rescue, and she uses her position in society as a woman to her advantage. She is no longer a pawn traded among men, but her father and the commodore become pawns in her plan to achieve what she desires. By this point in the film, Elizabeth has crafted her own identity and selected a path different from the one her father has chosen for her. She knowingly and successfully performs her role and meets the expectations of society. The successful performance results in what she wants: Will’s rescue. Though she could be seen as sacrificing her happiness, Elizabeth, her father, and the audience know that she will never marry the commodore. She uses the commodore’s desire to negotiate for what she wants, and she asserts her agency.

As the only female lead in the movie, the absence of other women in the film suggests that Elizabeth is forced to perform a womanhood that is defined by men. As she
comes into her own identity, she rejects the femininity that is imposed on her by male society, such as her father and Commodore Norrington, and she crafts a womanhood for herself. In Knightley’s performance of womanhood, she emphasizes Elizabeth’s characteristics of independence, autonomy, strength, and courage. Through her unconventional role as a woman who participates in piracy, Elizabeth chooses to be heard, seen, and participate as an active member of society. Knightley then projects these qualities onto the screen, which, I argue, female viewers desire to imitate.

Though *Pirates of the Caribbean* and *Ahab’s Wife* rewrite cultural maritime narratives and portray strong, independent womanhood for contemporary audiences, these two texts achieve their aims through different means. *Pirates of the Caribbean* redefines women’s roles through Knightley’s successful performance of femininity. Knightley projects the characteristics of bravery, strength, and ambition onto the screen for a mixed-audience. Male viewers are attracted to Knightley’s figure as well as the qualities of womanhood she portrays, and female viewers aim to emulate these characteristics. By contrast, in *Ahab’s Wife*, Naslund presents a strong, independent female character for a readership composed primarily of women. Further, in *Ahab’s Wife*, Una initially rejects womanhood and her presence within this community in her decision to pass as a sailor. She chooses to pass because she does not want to share in the same suffering and heartbreak women endure, and she wants her life to be different. Yet, during her passing, Una experiences new traumas and chooses to disclose her passing to the captain’s wife once she is rescued. She seeks comfort from women and recognizes the power of a female community. Una finds her independence and identity through the friendships she forms with other women in her community. Elizabeth, alternatively, lacks
a community of women. In the film, there is no “feminine” model for Elizabeth to imitate, nor is there a feminine community that she participates in. Instead, Elizabeth’s society and her role within it are defined by the men (her father and future husband) who seek to control her actions throughout the film. Elizabeth only finds her independence and mobility in her rejection of society and propriety, and her acceptance and piracy. She crafts her own vision of womanhood by creating a new community with individuals, such as Will Turner, who share her values.

Despite these differences, Ahab’s Wife and Pirates of the Caribbean both present a counter-narrative in which eighteenth and nineteenth century women have mobility. The sea provides both Una and Elizabeth with independence and agency, and the qualities they gain from their experience – autonomy, courage, strength, ambition, etc. – redefine their identities. Both Una and Elizabeth come into womanhood through their seafaring experience and choose their own paths based on their own desires. Through their performance of femininity, both characters model a womanhood for twenty-first century audiences to replicate. Elizabeth and Una, who are fiercely independent, challenge the ideals of “angel in the house” ideology and the cardinal virtues of true womanhood in which women are passive and submissive. At the end of Ahab’s Wife and Pirates of the Caribbean, both Una and Elizabeth are daughters and wives; but they are also independent, autonomous, visibly active in society, and their voices are heard.
Works Cited


Hanson, Emma Cole. *The Life and Sufferings of Miss Emma Cole: Being a Faithful Narrative of her Life*, Boston, M. Aurelius, 1844.


Karremann, Isabel. “‘The Sea Will Make a Man of Him?’: Hypervirility, Effeminacy, and the Figure of the Queen Pirate in the Popular Imagination from the Early Eighteenth-Century to Hollywood.” *Gender Forum*, vol. 1, no. 32, 2011, pp. 68-82.

Kippola, K. *Acts of Manhood: The Performance of Masculinity on the American Stage, 1828-

Iglesias, Luis A. “‘And Yet He May Be Our Man’: The Cross-Dressing Sailor in Cooper’s Early

Insko, Jeffrey. “‘All of Us Are Ahabs’: ‘Moby-Dick’ in Contemporary Public Discourse.” *The

Lane, Horace. *The Wandering Boy, Careless Sailor, and Result of Inconsideration: A


Marren, Susan. “Between Slavery and Freedom: The Transgressive Self in Olaudah Equiano’s

Matchie, Tom. “Ahab’s Wife, Or, The Star Gazer, A Wider/Deeper View of Melville’s Tragic
Hero and His Times.” *The Journal of American & Comparative Cultures*, vol. 24, no. 1-2,


