



Working within the System: The Sentimental Tropes of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Imitated in Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Married or Single?*

Marissa Bouska
Coe College

Abstract

*In the nineteenth century, many women writers exploited the sentimental genre in order to fight for human rights. While some of these works have been categorized as essential nineteenth-century texts, others, like Catharine Maria Sedgwick's last novel, *Married or Single?* (1857), are still considered odd in comparison. Since the republication of Sedgwick's novel in 2015, scholars have argued that Sedgwick sets up married/single as a binary choice, reinforcing the hierarchy instead of dismantling it. However, if we compare Sedgwick's text to those of her contemporaries, the novel positions itself as one working within the dominant ideology to create social reform.*

*This essay compares the sentimental tropes within Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Sedgwick's *Married or Single?*, such as the tragic death scenes and emotional appeals, illustrating the way Sedgwick imitated Stowe's use of the genre. By paralleling the same formula as Stowe, Sedgwick is able to work within the system to argue for the freedom for women to choose not to marry without becoming the stigmatized "old maid." Sedgwick's plot is able to remain convincing to the dominant ideology of the audience while at the same time to make them question this ideology to make room for the proto-New Woman.*

In the nineteenth century, many progressive women writers exploited the sentimental genre in order to fight for human rights. While some of these works, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, have been categorized as essential nineteenth-century texts, others like Catharine Maria Sedgwick's last novel, *Married or Single?* (1857), have disappeared into the abyss of out-of-print texts. Since the republication of Sedgwick's novel in 2015, there has been little scholarship covering the novel, and the small amount there is maintains that Sedgwick reinforces the dominant ideology of the time instead of dismantling it. However, if we compare Sedgwick's text to those of her contemporaries, the novel positions itself as one working within the dominant ideology to create

social reform. This essay compares the sentimental tropes within Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Sedgwick's *Married or Single?*, such as the narrative style, the character types, and the tragic death scenes, illustrating the way Sedgwick imitated Stowe's use of the genre. By paralleling the same formula as Stowe, Sedgwick works within the system to argue for the freedom for women to choose not to marry without becoming the stigmatized "old maid." Sedgwick's plot remains convincing to the dominant ideology of the audience while at the same time making it question this ideology in order to make room for the proto-New Woman.

Although Sedgwick's other works are commended for their use of benevolent citizenship, there is a reluctance among scholars in classifying Sedgwick's literary work as a liberal feminist text, especially her last novel, *Married or Single?*.¹ In Sedgwick's "Preface" to *Married or Single?*, she states her purpose: "Our story will not have been in vain, if it has done anything towards raising the single women of our country to the comparatively honorable level they occupy in England—any thing to drive away the smile already fading from the lips of all but the vulgar, at the name of 'old maid'" (7). Through this statement, Sedgwick claims the goal of her last novel was to give the "single women" of America the respect they deserve and to destroy the stigma of "old maid." Since its publication in 1857, critics and scholars have argued Sedgwick has failed in her attempt to equalize the single woman, as she sets up married/single as a binary choice, reinforcing the hierarchy instead of dismantling it. A review in *The Albion* from 1857 states, "the tale was designed to plead the cause of Spinster-hood. If this was so, the cause is not well pleaded" (393). Mary Kelley, in her 1978 essay "A Woman Alone," argues because the ending of the novel privileges marriage, Sedgwick ultimately places single women lower in the social hierarchy. Similarly, Susan Koppelman's introduction to Sedgwick's "old maids" suggests Sedgwick's focus on the importance of marriage and motherhood within her writing clearly positions being unmarried as the inferior station. In addition to these scholars, Deborah Gussman also argues in her book chapter, "'Equal to Either Fortune': Sedgwick's *Married or Single?* and Feminism," *Married or Single?* is one of the least analyzed of Sedgwick's texts because of her refusal to acknowledge the radical work of women's rights activism in her work. Although Gussman sees potential in Sedgwick's novel, she believes it fails because it does not go far enough to make lasting social reform.

While the majority of critics fail to acknowledge Sedgwick as a feminist, one scholarly source takes the opposite stance. In her article, "*Married or Single?*: Catharine Maria Sedgwick on Old Maids, and Marriage," Maglina Lubovich argues, "In making spinsters like wives, Sedgwick ultimately argues that the former are not simply peripheral to marriage, but actually part of its very workings

1. Benevolent Citizenship is the idea that middle-class women could help society by teaching the poor and working classes, working outside of their immediate family, but still close to home. Liberal feminism works within the system to reform it and focuses on women's equal participation in the existing social, legal, and political structure. By contrast, more radical movements advocate a complete revolution in those institutions and their values.

and definition” (24). Therefore, Lubovich believes there can be no meaning to being a married woman, without there being a reverse side to the binary, in this case a single woman. Being unmarried is essential to the “definition” of being married, and therefore, Lubovich argues, there can be no hierarchy because one is just as important to the other in the binary. This suggests there are scholars who would agree this text is working to fight for the equality of choice between getting married and staying single, and Sedgwick ultimately didn’t fail in her attempt to push the single woman forward. Yet by just looking at the text itself, or even Sedgwick’s other works, there is not a solid argument for her succeeding in destroying the stigma of “old maid” or completely equalizing the hierarchy of married and single women. I argue, however, if Sedgwick’s novel is taken a step further and compared to those of her contemporaries, then the novel uses some of the same tropes in order to work within the hegemonic system to make room for opportunities for women. Though more subtle than the “Declaration of Sentiments,” I argue *Married or Single?* is a work of liberal feminist literature, because it works within the dominant ideology to promote the rise of single women in an attempt to make marriage an actual choice instead of an obligation and creates space for the evolution of the New Woman.²

Similarly, Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was criticized for its sentimental tropes and was not taken seriously among scholarly critics after its publication until Jane Tompkins fought for its literary value in 1985. Sentimental literature, popular in the eighteenth century, has often been condemned for its use of implausible plots and often ludicrous amounts of feeling; therefore, Stowe’s book was cast off as popular but not serious literature like the work of her contemporaries Herman Melville and Nathaniel Hawthorne. Until Jane Tompkins’ 1985 book, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860*, sentimental fiction was completely disregarded as women’s writing which had no lasting power and did not follow the traditional format of serious fiction, such as Melville or Hawthorne. Tompkins, however, argues, “to see the sentimental novel not as an artifice of eternity answerable to certain formal criteria and to certain psychological and philosophical concerns, but as a political enterprise, halfway between sermon and social theory, that both codifies and attempts to mold the values of its time” (126). She insists these novels needed to be looked at as reshaping the perspective of history, from one centered on men to one driven by women. By placing women in the center of power, Stowe shows how the world could be changed without political power, but rather with domestic and religious transformation. Since Tompkins’s argument established a new way of viewing sentimental fiction, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* has become more regularly studied and written about as an influential novel, often even included in nineteenth-century American literary canons.

2. “Declaration of Sentiments” (1848) is a liberal feminist document outlining the rights American women should have by being United States citizens but do not have because of the patriarchal structure of the society in which they live. Created at the Seneca Falls Convention, it is an early example of a feminist political document in the United States.

While the woman-centered sentimental novel was not able directly to affect the political power governing oppressive institutions such as slavery and marriage, it was able to bring political situations such as these to the forefront of the minds of the middle-class. Markman Ellis adds to Tompkins's argument for the validation of sentimental literature in his book, *The Politics of Sensibility: Race, Gender and Commerce in the Sentimental Novel*. He states, "By addressing an audience that was disenfranchised and lacking power in political life, the sentimental novel effectively created a new political role for literature" (3). According to Ellis, the audience for the novel, the growing middle-class, made the sentimental novel as powerful as it was and gave it value in terms of serious fiction. Although there has been a disavowal of sentimental fiction because it appeals to the emotions and not to reason, making it less notable in a male-centric world, the genre reaches more people because it speaks a universal language of feeling. This emotion is often evoked using specific techniques used to help the reader sympathize with the characters who may not be as privileged as themselves, such as slaves, women, and the poor and working classes. The sympathy inspired by these tropes is used to inspire its readers to make a change. In *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform*, Amanda Claybaugh argues "*social reform depended on print*" (2), because the solution to social issues could not be formed without first spreading awareness of the issues through illustration in print. Stowe used these tropes in her abolitionist novel to represent the marginalized community of slaves, which produced sympathy and a shift towards finding a solution. This writing inspired other authors to use the same conventions in their own writings for their own causes.

As Catharine Maria Sedgwick's preface acknowledges several authors of her time period who have influenced her own writing, the comparison of the texts of her contemporaries to her own illustrates the careful use of sentimentalism within her novel to enact change. Pointing particularly to Harriet Beecher Stowe, Sedgwick states: "If we do not specify Mrs. Stowe, it is that she writes for all humanity" (5), signaling "Mrs. Stowe" is more important than others by giving her more space, two sentences to be specific. Giving this lengthy dedication to Stowe, Sedgwick nods at the author who inspired her to write for "all humanity" in a way that would reach a majority, without moving too far beyond the dominant ideology. Giving this much space to Stowe demands a comparison to Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* published in 1852, only five years before *Married or Single?* was originally published. The two books' styles seem almost identical, and Sedgwick's captures many of the sentimental tropes Stowe uses, such as the typification of characters, the rhetoric of true womanhood, emotional appeals to motherhood, traumatic death scenes, and the episodic form in order to work within the system to reform society. Tompkins claims, "The truths that Stowe's narrative conveys can only be reembodyed, never discovered, because they are already revealed from the beginning . . . demonstrating that human history is a continual reenactment of the sacred drama of redemption" (134). This notion of repetition

as truth is proven in Sedgwick's imitation of Stowe's style, as the form and tropes are "reembodied" in order to persuade the public to change their views on single women in a "reenactment" of "redemption." Even the unsatisfying ending, which fails to find an answer to the problem posed in Stowe's novel by sending the freed slaves back to Africa, and then in Sedgwick's, with the main single woman ending up married, shows the imitation of the sentimental genre in order to work within the dominant ideology to make social reform slowly, instead of delving into a radical show of equality which would likely have been rejected by readers.

Starting with a section on the narrative style, I argue that both Sedgwick and Stowe use tropes of the sentimental genre and its formatting as a tool to influence the audience emotionally into caring about the marginalized group they are trying to empower socially. Building on the sympathetic format to analyze the content, the next section analyzes the use of character types in both novels to show how typing certain characters becomes a way for the audience both to sympathize with those they have never met and to show how these characters can act as examples of how to reform long-standing institutions such as slavery and marriage. My final analytical section analyzes the plot and traces the traumatic death scenes within the novels, specifically those of the child angel, in order to illustrate the use of childhood innocence and religious duty as a call for action and change. Concluding with a section on liberal feminist-writers and the novel of purpose, I demonstrate how Stowe, and later Sedgwick, both used sentimental tropes in order to work within the dominant ideology to reform the patriarchal institutions of slavery and marriage socially.

Narrative Style

The narrative style of the sentimental novel has always tried to find a format in which to draw the most emotion from its reader. Starting with first-person epistolary, but eventually shifting to third-person omniscient, serial publication was a way to capture the audience's attention for social reform. The first popular sentimental novel, Samuel Richardson's *Pamela*, took the epistolary form as a way to give the reader an intimate account of what was happening to Pamela as she tried to protect herself from her predatory master. The narrative form was first person, but the use of letters to tell the story was incredibly one-sided and led the readers to question the reliability of the text. The format later fell out of fashion. Serial publication shaped the sentimental genre into a fragmentary narrative, as many novels of the nineteenth century were published chapter by chapter in literary magazines in an attempt to prolong suspense and make the audience slowly form emotional attachments to the characters. These emotional attachments helped in fighting for social reforms as they humanized the situations in which many marginalized groups found themselves trapped and ignored by those who could make a difference. As the majority of readers of the sentimental novel, such as women and poor men, were not necessarily able to make a political

change due to their lack of power, they could alter their attitudes and reform the society in which they lived, eventually altering the institutions that left many without a voice.

Stowe used this episodic form in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* to keep the reader engaged and always guessing. The third-person narrator takes an omnipresent view which helps us follow many characters (almost 30) and many story lines (including Uncle Tom, Eliza and George, Topsy, and Ophelia), even if they are not all in the same setting. Stowe traced several different slaves from the pre-Civil War South in order to show the variety of experiences of slaves and the hardship all of them encountered. Starting chapter one in "the State of Kentucky" (13) where "the mildest form of the system of slavery is to be seen" (13), the plot illustrates even "the mildest form" is inhumane as George and Eliza's children are sold and ripped away from their families by their owner. Stowe's third-person narrator even breaks into the story to name the injustice, saying, "Whoever visits some estates there . . . might be tempted to dream the oft-fabled poetic legend of a patriarchal institution, and all that; but over and above the scene there broods a portentous shadow—the shadow of *law*" (13). This statement shows the narrator pointing out the hypocrisy of slavery, stating the institution is an "oft-fabled poetic legend." By not only using "fabled," but also emphasizing it by using "poetic" and "legend" to describe the institution, the narrator illustrates how completely unrealistic and romantic the institution of slavery is to those who are not experiencing it firsthand. This suggests the following narrative will show the reality of slavery through the perspective of those who experience it firsthand. By providing various plot lines in which all of the slaves face unimaginable obstacles, Stowe shows how the institution of slavery itself is ethically wrong, even if the owners do not violently abuse their slaves.

While Sedgwick did not publish her last novel serially, but in a two-volume set, she mimicked the episodic format in order to create drama and suspense and true emotion in her readers. Sedgwick follows Stowe's style, as a third-person omniscient narrator tells the story of 1850s New York City and its citizens. Following several different plot lines, the story jumps in and out of different characters' lives and leaves the reader in suspense as one plot line takes over before the last has concluded. The focus of Sedgwick's novel, however, is not slavery but rather the institution of marriage and the customs and stigmas associated with the choice of whom to marry or even whether to marry at all. The story begins with two sisters but quickly expands to include more than forty characters. Beginning with an epistolary format, reminiscent of the early format of sentimental novels, Sedgwick provides a background of the marriages in Grace's family. One example is Aunt Sarah who writes, "'You know from what a wild, senseless dream I awoke, to find my husband was not the man I married, but idle, coarse, sensual, ill-tempered, a gambler, and a spendthrift'" (20). This example shows the danger of marrying because of societal pressures, as Aunt Sarah has been fooled into thinking she married someone who could take care of her, but

instead “awoke” to find the opposite after it was too late and they were married. The fact that this is told through letters is also important, because Aunt Sarah was dead and could not relate this herself. The death of Aunt Sarah evokes sympathy for the tragic life she lived because of her marriage when she could have been happier as a single woman.

This is only one of the stories of marriage which is included in the novel, yet it portrays one of the main points of the harmfulness of marriage, even though the other choice is to be stigmatized as a spinster. Although some of the characters are only mentioned through letters and flashbacks, these characters serve the important role of illustrating a complete range of marriages as they each have issues which influence Grace and Archibald as they decide on the choice of getting married or staying single. Sedgwick, by displaying several different marriages or potential marriages, illustrates how many marriages are unwanted and fail because of the pressure society puts on men and women to get married, much like Stowe’s use of several plot lines to show the gruesome similarity between the “nice” slave owners and the harmful ones. Without equality of the single woman, all marriages contain a power structure which is harmful for women. The ending of the novel shows a potential egalitarian marriage for Grace, because she has discovered she does not have to marry to maintain her status and respectability in society. She is not forced into a marriage to benefit financially but rather makes the conscious decision to marry based on knowledge of the man she will marry and the love she has for him. Grace’s marriage is an example of what can happen for all women if marriage is an actual choice instead of a necessity, the power structure will disappear, and women will have more rights in general.

Character Types

Another technique used in sentimental fiction is the use of character types not only to humanize marginalized groups of people, but also to illustrate how these types of people can change and evolve through sentimental encouragement, such as sympathy and religious duty. The typification of characters has often in twentieth-century writing been viewed in a negative light as stereotyping, or washing away all individuality of a person and grouping based on a single common trait. While stereotyping is often harmful in lived experiences, the typification of characters in sentimental novels is a technique which lends itself to empathy of all human beings. Tompkins argues, “The novel’s typological organization allows her [Stowe] to present political and social situations both as themselves and as transformations of a religious paradigm which interprets them in a way that readers can both understand and respond to emotionally” (135). Tompkins states the identification of the characters becomes a way for readers to recognize themselves or at least parts of themselves within these characters, making it easier to empathize with them and create real change based on that emotion. In his article, “Sentimental Types and Social Reform in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*,” Christopher Diller

takes this argument further by focusing on the religious aspects of Stowe's life and the way the types of characters reflect both a religious typology and a sociological typography in order to persuade the many different people of the United States to have sympathy and see the humanity and individuality of every person, especially slaves. He concludes with the idea that these individuals, who have done the right thing, should be typified and imitated in order to create a society in which everyone feels valued and empathetic. Claybaugh reiterates this argument by laying out the use of borrowing techniques such as plot, but more specifically characters, in order to evoke sympathy. He writes, "To feel sympathy with a slave or a worker is to recognize that he or she is a person in some way like oneself, and this makes his or her sufferings unacceptable" (24). Therefore, the technique of typification is not necessarily erasing individuality but is instead illustrating the humanity of the group of people who have been labeled as sub-human or lesser in the hierarchy of society, in Stowe's case slaves, and in Sedgwick's women (specifically single women). If the character has some identifiable traits to which readers can relate, it is easier to sympathize with them and from sympathy comes a need for change.

Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has been criticized in the twentieth and twenty-first century for stereotyping black lives, such as Uncle Tom's, yet Stowe also types white characters, such as Mrs. Bird, in an attempt to humanize them and get the reader to identify with them to make a change. While there are many different types available for analysis, I focus on Mrs. Bird as the most influential for the reader. Uncle Tom and the other slave character types were able to humanize slaves, however Mrs. Bird acted as an example of what white women could do for the cause. The character type of "angel of the house" was derived from the poem of the same name by Coventry Patmore, describing the ideal white wife who is submissive and gentle, self-sacrificing for her family, and devoted to the duties of the private sphere. As the "angel of the house," Mrs. Bird is the sweet and submissive wife, but she also uses her position to convince her husband into sympathizing with Eliza and to break the law in order to do what was right. She is, therefore, not only to remain in her ideal position as self-sacrificing wife, but also able to create social reform without political power.

Constantly labeled as a gentle and sweet woman and following the character type of "angel of the house," Mrs. Bird resonates with other middle class white woman of the 19th century. Even her opening description needs two adjectives to show just how shy and feminine she is: "Mrs. Bird was a timid, blushing woman." It is reasonable to ponder her capability of speaking her mind and defending herself and others when she is described in this way. Mrs. Bird containing the ". . . gentlest, sweetest voice in the world," again shown with feminine adjectives, could sound familiar to any one of the women of her race and class who read about her (113). The sweet and gentle phrases, used over and over again, relate Mrs. Bird to other white middle class woman of the 19th century. In this way, the text displays how other women of this time could stand up for their beliefs just as Mrs. Bird does. By repeatedly referring to her gentleness and

then just as persistently describing her ferocity, Stowe reveals Mrs. Bird's actions to uphold justice to be both surprising and also empowering for other women. Her actions when she sees an injustice are described as "vehement," "crazy," and "alarming and inexplicable in proportion to her general softness" (113). Mrs. Bird uses her ferocity to hinder cruelty against defenseless creatures. When Mrs. Bird knows something is ". . . downright cruel and unchristian" she will neither back down nor continue to be the timid woman described in her introduction (112). While surprising, seeing such a gentle woman maintain justness sets an example for white, middle-class women everywhere. If sweet, little Mrs. Bird could still be passionate about her beliefs than so could other women of the 19th century.

Mrs. Bird may not possess political power, but she continually uses her passion to fight for her beliefs by doing anything to protect the defenseless. She shows how she will fight for her principles by chastising her husband over his choice to vote for the Fugitive Slave Law and by challenging him to act in violation of the law. Mrs. Bird directly accuses her husband, saying "You ought to be ashamed, John!" (114). She calls on his sympathy for the "Poor, homeless, houseless creatures!" using three adjectives to describe the runaway slaves because of the "shameful, wicked, abominable law," which she uses another three adjectives to decry. Extraordinarily upset by this law for which her husband voted, she needs exclamation points to accompany her words. By rebuking him, she remains the "angel of the house" as the moral guide of her husband and makes him think twice about his actions, continuing to fight for what she believes is right.

Using this technique, Sedgwick is also able to type characters in order to humanize them, such as Jessie Manning (the fallen woman) and Eleanor Herbert (the angel in the house), to call for a change in these types based on the need for equality of single women. In *Married or Single?*, just as in Stowe's novel, we have a marginalized character in need of humanizing (Jesse), and a character who is used as an example of how women could support each other's equality (Eleanor). Jessie Manning is the epitome of the fallen woman, similar to Clarissa Harlowe, from one of the first sentimental novels. The character type of the fallen woman describes a woman who had sex outside of marriage, whether consensual or not, who often dies in the end of the story because she can no longer live without being the ideal woman. By using this trope as humanizing the character, Sedgwick illustrates the need for the destruction of the stigma of old maid, as Jessie was only attempting to escape her oppression as an unmarried woman. Eleanor Herbert, on the other hand, is another example of the angel of the house character, someone to whom the white, middle-class female readers could relate but also someone who supports Grace's decision to stay single, demonstrating the ability to support equality from a place of privilege, but not of power.

Jessie Manning, the fallen-woman character, who was not born into a position of privilege, finds herself in a difficult situation after she loses her virginity to Horace Copley. Copley is a rich man, who Jessie thinks will marry

her, but in the end Jessie dies of complications from childbirth. Her character illustrates a number of women who found themselves so pressured into not being a stigmatized old maid. She gave up her so-called virtue in return for a future marriage only to find she was completely fooled and must die instead of live in shame. Jessie humanizes this marginalized group of women who end up in these positions because of the social system which forces them into compromising situations and keeps them there through the pressure of marriage. After Jessie quit working for Horace Copley's mother, Madame Copley remarks about Jessie, "the city will, in all probability, be her ruin. Satan lies in wait there for pretty, thoughtless girls!" (103). This statement illustrates Madame Copley noticing a pattern of poverty and danger for "pretty, thoughtless girls" as they have no one to watch over them and keep them from being fooled by men like Horace.

Appearing in an apartment provided by Horace and realizing he will never marry her, Jessie muses: "She knew she had loved—she believed she had been loved—she knew she had been wronged—she feared she was deserted, and mingling with, and embittering all, was a confused sense of shame and degradation" (104). Jessie is humanized as we see her thought process and follow how she had been tricked into becoming a fallen woman. Any girl could be susceptible to this persuasion in the pursuit of marriage, yet Jessie had no one on her side to warn or protect her from this situation. When all she has been told is that she needs to get married, it is no wonder she might be fooled into give in to premarital sex for the prospect.

In her death, Jessie is given even more sympathy as she is finally forgiven by God and also labeled as a victim, humanizing "fallen" women to the readers and providing religious reasons for the support of other marginalized women. Jessie's death culminates as she convinces her mother to forgive Horace Copley instead of cursing him, saying "'Now all my trouble is over, mother. God has forgiven us both. We shall meet in heaven'" (238–239). The use of "God" at the time of her death and noting his ultimate forgiveness, forces readers to acknowledge their religious duty in forgiving these women and trying to help them out of service to God. This is shortly followed by an interjection from the narrator:

Here, in the deep shadows of obscurity, lay this victim of a man of the world, degraded—*not corrupted*—a beautiful flower ruthlessly crushed, God's gracious gifts thrown away, and the good purpose of his providence contravened. Here, her life taken away, her pure name blighted, never to be spoken, but with scorn or sighs; here she lay—dead—on the bosom of a broken-hearted mother! (240)

This outburst by the narrator only adds to the sympathy of Jessie and other fallen women, as they refer to her as a "victim," implying it was not her fault but that it happened to her. The term "degraded" also suggests it might have lowered her, but it did not destroy her, emphasized by the separation by -em dashes and the italicized phrase "*not corrupted*." Corrupted invokes a need to completely rebuild,

whereas, degraded is just a step-down but can be fixed without destroying the whole. The reiteration of “God” again not only reminds readers of their religious duty but also of the good work Jessie could have been doing if she had never met Horace. The sentimental monologue finishes with two pleas, one to forgive the reputation of fallen women “never to be spoken, but with scorn or sighs,” the other a last appeal to motherhood, as her “broken-hearted mother” had to watch her child die because of this. This could happen to any girl, and this final plea is to raise the single woman up to keep this situation from happening to anyone, let alone the reader’s daughter. Therefore, Jessie acts as a warning, but also as a humanizing example of the consequences of putting so much pressure on women to marry and of the stigma of being a single woman.

Eleanor Esterly, Grace’s married sister, is the angel of the house character type, someone to whom the readers can relate, but also a strong example of how women without any political authority could socially reform the stigma of single women by continually supporting her sister in her choice to stay single. After breaking off her engagement to Horace, Grace decides she will remain single through the support of her sister, about whom earlier in the story Grace noted, “Eleanor is teaching me that there is more than one mode of securing independence” (232). These small votes of confidence from Eleanor throughout her life have given Grace the confidence to be a single woman, even if it means taking on the stigma of old maid. Upon her decision, Eleanor writes a three-page long paper, congratulating her on making this decision and lecturing her readers on the ways they can make this decision easier for women:

Dear Sister, it is a consolation (excuse the word) that your example may send a thrill of courage or of resignation to many hearts. One noble, single woman, who devotes her faculties (her ten or her one talent) to the service of God and humanity. . . . Let women, who have not a home with a master, and a nursery in it, make themselves welcome in many homes, by making them the brighter and happier for their presence; let them . . . fall on any wise and profitable occupation, and the prim and ridiculous maiden-aunt will vanish from our novels, and the Lucretia Mac Tabs from our comedies, and, what is better, the single gossip will disappear from town and village, and the purring ‘old maid’ from garrets and chimney corners. (430–431). This letter starts off with a slight jab in the word “consolation,” showing Eleanor would rather have Grace married. However, she goes on for three more pages to build Grace’s decision up as an equally important cause, as she apologizes in an aside “(excuse the word).” While she knows the stigma surrounding single women, because her sister has chosen this path, she supports her and hopes that stigma will eventually disappear. She believes Grace can be an example of “courage” to women who want to remain single and “of resignation” to those women who have to be single in order to illustrate single women are not any lower in the social hierarchy, because they can use their time and “talents” to serve others. The use of the adjective “noble” followed by “single” connects the two and shows Eleanor’s support and respect

for Grace's decision, as well as her respect for all single women. She also believes single women will make everywhere "brighter and happier," as raising the status of single women will give independence to all women. Her last string of phrases suggests she hopes single women will find "a wise and profitable occupation" to support themselves, so women no longer need to be dependent on husbands, but also so the "maiden aunt," the "Lucretia Mac Tabs," and the "gossip" about "old maids" will disappear in a show of support for independence.³ Eleanor knows the reputation of single women, but has chosen to support her sister and raise the status so all women will be able to have more freedom.

Later in her letter, Eleanor broaches the topic of the pressure to marry as she writes, "it is merely to guard the social relations and dependencies that marriage is so fenced about with honor, respect, and good report" (431). With this pointed remark, Eleanor shows the disadvantages to marriage as it is only surrounded by "honor, respect, and good report" because it keeps the social system in place, keeping all women in an inferior position and dependent on men to work and support them. By promoting the equality of single women, Eleanor is suggesting all women can have more independence, but the support of peers is necessary to the process. When the narrator says, "Whether she were elevated or degraded by this step, must be left to the judgment of her peers" (358), she shows the power behind the social opinion of "peers" and their ability to change the stigma if they decided to start supporting single women for choosing what is best for them instead of pressuring them into loveless, dangerous marriages. By using Eleanor as a familiar angel of the house character, Sedgwick argues this acceptance and equality will only lead to greater equality for all women, instead of keeping them in dependent marriages, making room within the system for a new, more independent woman.

Traumatic Death Scenes and the Child Angel

The last sentimental trope I will be comparing in this essay is the traumatic death scene, which happen several times in Stowe's novel and even more often in Sedgwick's *Married or Single?*. The often-exaggerated and extremely religious deaths of characters push other characters and the reader into action, as the deaths create martyrs for the cause. In the nineteenth century, death and mourning practices were a large part of the social atmosphere. Tompkins discusses the importance of the child angel in sentimental fiction, whom she describes as a child who dies of some unnamed cause and who changes the hearts and minds of those around her/him, often becoming a sacrifice for the greater good. Tompkins writes, "Dying is the supreme form of heroism. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, death is the equivalent not of defeat but of victory; it brings access of power, not a loss of it" (127). The deaths of Eva, Herbert Esterly, and Elise Tallis all push the other characters into changing their opinions and lifestyles, as well

3. Lucretia Mac Tab is an "old, maiden aunt" character in the 1801 play *The Poor Gentleman: A Comedy, in Five Acts* by George Colman.

as the readers who sympathize with them. Children are also often bearers of the unfiltered truth, and, because of their innocence, they tend to simplify matters and bring adults back to the basic beliefs of kindness and acceptance and faith. While not the only characters to die, children are often the easiest to empathize with as they appeal to parenthood in a way adults cannot. Therefore, the child angel is a strategic technique in the sentimental genre as it creates sympathy but also impels readers to take action by changing their opinions back to the simple innocent truths professed by the child.

In Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the character of Eva St. Clare is a source of hope as a child angel, as her death becomes the ultimate religious call to action to sympathize with Topsy and Uncle Tom and the slave they represent. As Eva's sickness worsens, she pleads to her mother, "'But, mamma, it's so different to be brought up as I've been, with so many friends, so many things to make me good and happy; and to be brought up as she's been, all the time, till she came here!'" (406). Eva is using her mother's love for her to transfer some sympathy to Topsy, a slave girl who is a bit wild but still deserves to be treated like a human. The comparison between Eva's upbringing and Topsy's illustrates a commonality, because they are both girls; however, the contrast between them reveals Eva's privilege and shows the disadvantages Topsy faced because she was "brought up" a slave. While Eva has "so many friends" and things to make her "good and happy," she has obviously had the opportunity to grow up in a nurturing home, unlike Topsy, who needs sympathy because she has not had the same opportunities "till she came here!" The exclamation point at the end of this plea emphasizes Eva's effort to appeal to her mother based on her mother's love for her.

In her last conversation, Eva calls on her father and his love for her, to have sympathy for his slaves and be more Christian in treating them as human beings. She appeals to his need to protect her, pleading, "'Papa, you break my heart!' said Eva, rising and throwing herself into his arms; 'you must not feel so!' and the child sobbed and wept with a violence which alarmed them all, and turned her father's thoughts at once to another channel" (413). As with her mother, Eva uses the paternal bond to change her father's opinion and make him more Christian. Eva blames him "you break my heart!" and giving him a way to correct it by "not feel[ing] so!" The use of both "sobbed" and "wept" also indicates an abundance of tears, emphasized by the term of "violence" which gives the call to action a strength not usually associated with a child. The last clause of this statement shows the call worked, as she "turned her father's thoughts at once" showing the power of the emotional plea.

Eva's final moments are filled with religious rhetoric to appeal to readers and their Christian duty to make heaven an opportunity for everyone, especially slaves. The narrator describes her last actions: "Ah, what said those eyes, that spoke so much of heaven? Earth was past, and earthly pain; but so solemn, so mysterious, was the triumphant brightness of that face, that it checked even the sobs of sorrow" (420). The religious rhetoric surrounding Eva's death,

reminds the reader of “Earth” and “earthly pain” of the slaves about which Eva has been appealing to her parents for the entire chapter. By bringing it back to Eva’s “triumphant brightness,” it is difficult not to recall her final pleas and call to action, as she is “triumphant” because she has already changed the minds of her parents. Eva’s death is supposed to effect change as she is a martyr through her death. The combination of the religious rhetoric and the statement of triumph appeal to the readers to show how simple it can be to fulfill their religious duty by sympathizing with the slaves.

Sedgwick also uses the child angel to tell truths and provide martyrs for her cause of raising the status of single women as a way of protecting the sanctity of marriage. However, because most of these accounts are in letters in the perspectives of others, it displays the importance of the child angels to the characters in pushing them towards social reform. Eleanor Esterly’s son, and Grace’s nephew, Herbert, has died suddenly, his death becoming a catalyst for Grace’s decision to respect the sanctity of marriage by following the advice of a child. Grace recounts in a letter the memory of Herbert’s sister, May, showing a child’s grief at the loss of the child: “‘Erby would like my flowers best; I know he would because he knows Mr. Lisle gave them to me. I have picked them—every one—for him—Mr. Lisle won’t care.’ Tears were on the earnest little thing’s cheeks” (203). This reaction illustrates the innocence with which children feel sympathy and teaches Grace and the reader how to sympathize with others. As she spent the time to pick flowers “—every one—for him—,” the text emphasizing this time with large pauses as these clauses are separated by -em dashes, Grace is exemplifying the innocence of childhood. Also the repetition of “Mr. Lisle” in this statement implies he is important to the little girl and therefore should be taken into consideration as such. Grace wonders, “Is there a detective power in the innocence of childhood?” (203), implying her blindness and unwillingness to question because of her own experiences and loss of “innocence.” As children not much of the world is known, and it is all right to question everything. As an adult, however, it is much harder, because answers grow much more complex, and things are solidified by social conditioning. “The innocence of childhood,” therefore, allows May a way to use her “detective power” to question the world and the social customs seeing straight through the complexities to the simple solution.

Religious rhetoric again surrounds the child’s death, reminding readers of the earthly pains of the less fortunate and their religious duties to them. Grace describes farther in her letter of Herbert’s father’s reaction to the death:

There were no outbreking, irrepressible expressions of grief; his prayer was rather a thank-offering for the gift of the boy, for the sweet blessing of his two years of life, for his passage through the gates of immortality before temptation had assailed him, or the world in any way stained him; for his safe wardship in Jesus’s arms, instead of their imperfect care. (202)

This passage emphasizes the importance of God in the creation of the boy, especially in the phrase “thank-offering for the gift of the boy.” However, there is also a clear display of faith, as there are “no outbreking, irrepressible expressions of grief,” illustrating an example of an unquestioning belief that this was for the best. As the passage continues, it reminds readers of earth’s hardships as Herbert is not “through the gates of immortality,” and is able to escape from the “temptations” before anything “stained him.” This prayer captures the cruelty of people and the “imperfect care” of others yet calls to action those listening to care more about those suffering on this earth who haven’t been as blessed.

The last message in the letter conveys the importance of following the sanctity of marriage and by pressuring girls into marriages they do not want, it destroys the entire idea of religious marriage. Grace contemplates, “how surely God’s curse follows the vows lightly spoken—base motivated—the ill assorted marriage, what a mockery it is of God and nature!” (204). Again, “God” is invoked to try to appeal to the religious showing them the harms of “God’s curse” and the “mockery” of an “ill-assorted marriage.” This is clearly a plea in the last mentions of Herbert Esterly’s death to the dangers of “vows lightly spoken” as the death of the child is symbolic of the “curse.” While Frank and Eleanor’s marriage is not the most horrific of the novel, it shows a lack of respect of Eleanor and hints at the way society pressured them into this marriage. Although they probably didn’t say their vows as a mockery, the fact they don’t strictly follow these vows leads them to the loss of a child. Grace’s contemplation at the end of the death scene signals a connection she is making but also ties the emotions and sentiments of Herbert’s death to the single women forced into marriage either for money or social standing or survival or even to avoid the stigma of spinster, in an effort to sway the reader.

Another child angel occurs a bit later in the book, sending a similar message about the sanctity of marriage and the breakdown of religion in forcing women to marry men they do not love. Elise Tallis is the child of Augusta Tallis, who has been cheating on her husband. Elise, with her childhood innocence, knows of the affair and pleads with her mother, ““I don’t love him a morsel, and I wish you did not, mamma—I wish you loved papa”” (280). Through this plea, Elise is again drawing on her mother’s love for her in an effort to change her opinion. The parallelism of the two phrases starting with “I wish” displays the wrong and right thing to do from a child’s perspective. There is no gray area here, but a concrete right and wrong separated by an -em dash, which at the same time connects the two phrases for comparison. The narrator even interjects a religious message in response to Elise’s plea, “Children are God’s messengers. Woe to the mother whom they do not persuade to rectitude!” (281), implying the “detective powers” of children are messages from “God,” illustrating the right thing to do based on religious duty. The warning that follows is also a foreshadowing in the novel, as Augusta is “the mother” who was not persuaded to “rectitude,” and therefore, must heed caution.

This foreshadowing eludes to Elise's death as a punishment for Augusta for disrespecting her vows, but also for taking them in the first place. In another letter, this one to Grace, Augusta then pours out her guilt, "I think she did not complain till after a note was brought in to me from Copley, informing me of your engagement, and telling me he would come to me in the course of the evening" (293). This statement shows a direct correlation between Augusta's affair and Elise's death, as "she did not complain" until Copley was brought into the conversation. In Augusta's mind, Elise was only reacting to Copley and was making up the illness; however, when it turned out to be a real sickness, the only reasoning is the affair. She later in the letter connects the death to her affair: "Think of my folly; think of it—and of my punishment. Oh, my child, my child!" (294). The term "punishment" implies Augusta did something for which she needed to be punished, and the acknowledgement of this shows she feels a great deal of guilt. The repetition of "my child" emphasizes how she put her daughter on line for her affair and becomes an appeal to other mothers and parents in general to see the correlation and correct the problem and stop forcing women to marry.

The closing passage of the death scene results in a direct appeal to the reader, borrowed from Unitarian Minister Edmund H. Sears's book, *Regeneration* (1853). Sedgwick uses the credibility of a minister to question the readers and make them sympathize with the characters of the book and those who are marginalized. The passage states:

'Have you, reader, ever experienced a great sorrow? and if so, have you not seen afterward how it discloses heights and depths in your spiritual nature which you had never known . . . how little animosities and hatreds are banished and forgotten, while the heart has new yearnings toward all that live, and especially toward all that suffer; how the soul sickens at mere show and appearances, and demands realities, while it hungers after the good and the true.' (304-305)

The direct address, calling out the "reader," acts as a way of pushing the reader into action. Along with the rhetorical questions, starting with, "Have you, reader, ever experienced a great sorrow?" and continuing with almost a page's worth of questions, this passage gives readers the opportunity to reflect on their own lives and the lives of those around them. Are they really living up to their religious duty? The passage also highlights the marginalized, illustrating the importance of this duty "toward all that suffer," which includes the most marginalized of society but also those who have done wrong and are now suffering, such as Augusta. The passage continues with the phrase, "soul sickens." Readers are reminded of their own souls, and the religious rhetoric brings them back to the duties they have towards others. Augusta is the example, illustrating the foolishness of ignoring the "realities" of the situation. This draws a connection back to the reader, who is also ignoring the "realities" by ignoring the lives of those who are suffering and not trying to change it. This emotional appeal filled with rhetorical questions acts as a reflection on the death of Elise, who died as a martyr for the sanctity of

marriage and the need for the rise of status of single women who are represented as corrupting that sanctity.

Liberal Feminist Writers and the Novel of Purpose

Not all feminists are radical, some are even more conservative than we would like to believe, especially looking back at women with influence, such as Stowe and Sedgwick. However, by remaining in the dominant ideology and creating space within the system, they are ultimately making social reform for their respective purposes. While many would not classify Stowe as a feminist, because she refused to speak in front of crowds because it was not proper for respectable women, through her writing and her attempt to make the lives of slaves, especially female slaves, better through humanizing them, others would classify her as a liberal feminist. Liberal feminism seems often times to work in opposition to more radical movements, because it works within the system to reform the system without creating a complete revolution, often times through writing and speaking about issues appealing to men and women across the United States. Tompkins also argues this without using the term, writing:

But Stowe's very conservatism—her reliance on established patterns of living and traditional beliefs—is precisely what gives her novel its revolutionary potential. By pushing those beliefs to an extreme and by insisting that they be applied universally, not just to one segregated corner of civil life, but to the conduct of all human affairs, Stowe means to effect a radical transformation of her society. (145)

The “conservatism” of Stowe works to infiltrate the dominant ideology in order to create space for reform within the system. In this way, her work is not so radical it does not appeal to the audience, but shifts opinions subtly enough to make a change in society.

In the same way, Sedgwick works to create space for the rise of the single woman, and therefore, the rise of the New Woman. Using the sentimental tropes of Stowe's social-reform novel, Sedgwick illustrated the social problem of the pressures of marriage based on the reputation her society gave to single women. As Claybaugh suggests in her book, *The Novel of Purpose*, Sedgwick believes by illustrating the problem of dangerous, arranged (and unholy) marriages and the single women who are pressured into these marriages, that she is inspiring social reform of the entire patriarchal institution. Slowly introducing single women into the dominant ideology with respect and equality, Sedgwick is humanizing them to the middle-class public who have the ability to remove the stigma and promote singleness as an actual choice instead of a failure. If remaining unmarried is a respectable choice, women no longer have to be trapped in unwanted marriages. Egalitarian marriages, consequently, will become the norm, because women can choose if they will marry at all. The rise of the single woman promoted equality in other areas, creating a space for women who control their own social, political, and

economic lives almost twenty years before the New Woman movement occurred. The slow change of the dominant ideology and social reform are created by liberal feminist writers such as Stowe and Sedgwick because of their ability to represent problems and humanize marginalized people.

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