

PRAYER AND PREACHING:
FEMALE RELIGIOUS AGENCY IN COOPER, APRESS, AND WARNER

by

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Dedicated to Jeff, Belinda, and Betsy Thomas,
as well as the members of my committee—
Dr. Theresa Gaul, Dr. Dan Williams, and Dr. Richard Leo Enos.
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and encouragement.

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Introduction

Scholars have often talked about women in nineteenth-century literature in terms of the power they lack. While many female characters in American fiction do lack a certain amount of agency or power, I evaluate a different avenue of agency that critics often ignore—that of Christian practices. Specifically, I examine James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), William Apess's *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians* (1833), and Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1851) to scrutinize the roles that religion played in the lives of women—fictional and non-fictional—in order to argue that seemingly powerless women did have limited avenues for claiming agency. Religious practices made it acceptable for women to read, write, and use their voices, and over time this could afford women increasingly public roles in American life. The three texts I have chosen, while different in many ways, are linked by their emphasis on women's roles in religion, especially the practices of reading religious texts, preaching/proselytizing, and singing hymns.

These three texts are not normally placed beside each other, though they allow readers to examine how diverse groups of women, feminized men, and authors portray—in particular—singing and preaching as means of power. In the last few decades, scholars have discussed Cooper less while evaluating the works of Apess and Warner (along with other female and non-white authors) more. Putting these three unique works under similar lenses, I consider recent scholarship on religion in nineteenth century literature in relation to these texts. As scholars discuss the roles of women in early American society more and more, these three texts need to be scrutinized in order to show how male, female, and non-white authors were portraying women in American society; we must also evaluate the ways in

which women in these texts had or lacked agency. While there is much scholarship available on Cooper, very little discusses women, and even less discusses religion (most recent scholarship discusses race and masculinity). There is surprisingly little scholarship on Apess,¹ and the women from his *Experiences of Five Christian Indians* are largely overlooked in favor of discussions of Apess as an individual and as a member of the Pequot and Christian communities. Finally, there is also relatively little scholarship on Warner, given the novel's bestseller status in the mid-nineteenth century; while a handful of scholars look at religion in Warner's text, they do not fully examine the idea of female agency through religion, and they do not tap into the richness of Bible verses and hymns that are central in Warner's novel. When evaluating *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians*, and *The Wide, Wide World*, scholars have largely ignored female characters or depicted them as helpless. I feel it is important to focus on these female characters and re-evaluate the idea of agency and power in nineteenth-century America—as well as the ways that they were using rhetorical strategies, or rhetorics of religion—which can inform how we view agency in prior and subsequent periods of history.

A History of Christianity in Antebellum America

Scholars of gender and religion paint a portrait of early American religious life that granted women more scope for religious expression than stereotypes of the Salem witch trials or Anna Hutchinson's banishment would suggest. As European settlers came to America in search of religious freedoms, the backdrop of American history includes discussions and new expressions of religion. Puritanism was popular in the colonies, and scholars have argued for

¹ A number of scholars wrote about Apess in the 1990s, but they mostly focused on Apess's life and other works (see chapter 2 for specific examples).

the increasingly involved roles of women in religion, and particularly in Puritanism. That is not to say, though, that men were not still viewed as the leaders of households, including Puritan households. For instance, Mary Beth Norton states the following about early American religion:

In such nuclear households [as were forming in colonial America], power gravitated to the husband and father: he dominated his wife, children, and other dependents without fear of interference from kin or community. A wife was expected to defer to her husband, and he in turn expected to direct the lives of all his dependents—spouse, children, and servants alike. Reformation (and especially Puritan) theology, which was aggressively masculine in its orientation, reinforced this secular development. The rejection of Roman Catholicism included the abolition of the cult of the Virgin Mary and the removal of the convent option from women's lives. In addition, Puritanism stressed the religious role of paterfamilias; he was responsible for the spiritual well-being of all members of his household, and they were consequently expected to defer to him in religious as well as secular matters. (596)

Scholars can certainly agree that men maintained autonomy in the home and were the *ultimate* authorities on all matters. Yet women at least had the ability to be religious and exercise their power as moral figures and models. Sylvia Brown notices a paradox in Puritanism where women are expected to be silent, yet their words are also valued in that women teach children about morality (188). They “had an evangelical role in building up the numbers of the godly. They not only converted ungodly husbands, but, preeminently, they brought their children into the family of faith. They were the first, and therefore the most influential, religious instructors” (191). Therefore, while lacking a voice in most matters,

Puritan women had somewhat strong voices in religious and moral matters, which was manifested in the home for teaching and mothering and in the church as members of the Puritan congregation.

Susan Hardman Moore even claims that Puritan imagery was largely feminine. Men described themselves spiritually as women and as brides of God. Moore states the following:

We have arrived at some answers to the question of why male puritans used female imagery to express and define their religious experience: a quest for intimacy with God that found a perfect metaphor in marriage; a drive towards gendered thinking that infected spirituality and theology as well as conduct books. Spiritual gender-reversal, which at first sight might appear to allow men to depart from their gender role, subverts the gendered order only superficially. When men became brides of Christ in spirit, they took on female roles they themselves had devised. There is a sad irony in the fact that men needed feminized language to express spiritual intimacy and the drama of conversion: the gender stereotypes they were creating left them with no other language for what, in terms of conventions, was ‘unmanly.’ (185)

Women were still seen as subordinate to men, and female imagery was not altogether flattering towards women, but the idea that Puritan men took on feminized roles in their religious views and practices is intriguing. It connotes that religion was deeply feminine, even for male worshippers, which we see in Cooper’s text not only with the Christian, ideal, female Alice Munro but also with the feminized, Christian psalmist, David Gamut.

Of course, one may distinguish between women’s roles across denominations, so a sole analysis of Puritanism is not a complete analysis. Many scholars write about another prevalent denomination in American religion—Quakerism. More than any other Christian

denomination, Quakers have been known for their inclusive views on women and race.

Thomas D. Hamm says, “One of the distinctive features of Quakerism that invariably drew the attention, and sometimes the ire, of observers before 1900 was the standing of women.

Almost unique among Protestant denominations, Quaker women spoke in worship and served as ministers. They also had a considerable role in leadership” (184). While women were not altogether equal to their male counterparts, they had much autonomy in religious matters, and contemporary Quaker women are proud of their heritage as ““mothers of feminism”” (184-5). Karin A. Wulf also describes Quakerism in terms of a partnership between men and women. She states the following about gender roles:

Salvation, attained through the spontaneous action of the inner light, therefore rescued men and women from the debased state of their sin. Quakers interpreted redemption not only as immortality, but also as a release from the bonds of sexual hierarchy. Thus, “in the restoration” men and women were again “helpsmeet.”

Without the explicit gender hierarchy of the other Protestant faiths, Quaker women became not only true coreligionists, but also ministers, whose exhortations were designed to encourage both good behavior and conversion. (85)

Sexual equality in religious matters, therefore, was written into the very creed of Quakerism.

Another denomination that is worth scrutinizing is that of the Baptists. Janet Moore Lindman states that Baptist women did not have the religious power and presence of Quaker women but followed more traditional lines of Protestant faith. Meetings were male-dominated, and women were not allowed to preach. However, Baptist women still had their own church culture and aided in the proliferation of women’s group that we see in the nineteenth century, such as Sunday school programs, Bible societies, and missionary

societies for women (128-9). Therefore, women did have more religious freedom than any other kind of freedom, and George Brown Tindall and David E. Shi describe Baptist women as being even more autonomous in religious matters than Lindman states. Tindall and Shi say that Baptists “explicitly stressed the equality of all men and women before God, regardless of one’s wealth, social standing, or educational training” (541). Whichever characterization is more accurate, these scholars agree that, while not allowed to have power in church governance, women were still expected and allowed to be quite active in church activities and even build their own networks of female parishioners. These networks were important to people, as religious camp meetings “offered a redemptive social outlet to isolated rural folk. This was especially true for women, for whom the camp meetings provided an alternative to the rigors and loneliness of frontier domesticity. Camp meetings also brought a more settled community life through the churches they spawned, and they helped spread a more democratic faith among the frontier people” (Tindall and Shi 542).

Finally, other denominations show that women were able to move more freely within the religious sphere than in any other sphere. Free Will Christians believed in female authority figures in the church (Meyers, *Gender* 226). They also believed in equal marriage partnerships, where men and women shared the burden of labor. Men often bequeathed their land to their wives in order to continue the balance of power they had in life, and women who wrote wills also respected the notion of equality between male and female offspring (227). Also, “Roman Catholic women were encouraged to act as spiritual leaders by establishing religious orders.” Roman Catholics worshipped the Virgin Mary on a status equal to Jesus Christ, beginning in the seventeenth century. Arminians joined the Roman Catholics as they embraced female saints and paid them respect in daily observances (226).

Even outside of church, though, European women in colonial America had roles that differed from women in much of the world because of their particular circumstances as settlers in a new world. Karin E. Gedge discusses how colonial men and women shared the same domestic space, especially in the families of men who worked as artisans and farmers. Families were confined to the home, and both men and women were responsible for raising children. Therefore, while women were not powerful, they seemed to be working more side-by-side with their husbands in the home. Furthermore, some women who gained more autonomy, “especially in the absence of husbands,” were “running households, farms, and businesses” (213). Women became the “republican mothers” in the new society of the revolutionary era and became more responsible “for raising moral, productive young men as future citizens of the republic” (213). Therefore, while still remaining within their realm as subordinate teachers, mothers, and church members, women were slowly gaining more autonomy as their tasks were broadened. Mary Beth Norton continues this discussion as she states the following:

Throughout the colonial period, religion—or at least certain Protestant sects—had provided women with a nonfamilial outlet for their talents. Women’s religious activities had worked to increase their independence from husbands and fathers, and religion had consistently supplied the one realm in which women could undeniably claim equality with men, even if that equality was defined in wholly spiritual terms. (615)

Indeed, church life increasingly became a woman’s sphere as women were able to carve a niche for themselves in religious matters.

George Brown Tindall and David E. Shi depict women as even more autonomous than most authors do. They describe women in the eighteenth century—during the time in which Cooper’s novel is set:

Despite the conventional mission of women to serve in the domestic sphere, the scarcity of labor opened opportunities. Quite a few women by necessity or choice went into gainful occupations. . . . In the towns women commonly served as tavern hostesses and shopkeepers, but occasionally women also worked as doctors, printers, upholsterers, glaziers, painters, silversmiths, tanners, and shipwrights—often, but not always, widows carrying on their husbands’ trades. Some managed plantations, again usually carrying on in the absence of husbands. . . . The acute shortage of women in the early years made them more highly valued than in Europe, and the Puritan emphasis on well-ordered family life led to laws protecting wives from physical abuse and allowing for divorces. In addition, colonial laws allowed wives greater control over property that they had contributed to a marriage or that was left after a husband’s death. (115)

Of course, women’s roles were still largely relegated to the domestic sphere, but America was offering opportunities for autonomy to some women. Their roles depended greatly on their geography, their social status, and how many men were present where they lived, but certainly the idea of an independent woman was not unheard of in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—even if such an idea was not particularly favorable for the “ideal” woman.

The American Revolution also altered the roles of women. Previously, religion and politics were seen as separate realms, where women were allowed to be religious but not

allowed to enter into politics (Crane 53). Yet the Revolution brought with it questions of morality and justice, which could not be separated from religious principles and ideologies. On the Revolution, Elaine Forman Crane says, “Religious convictions motivated many women to take sides in the struggle for Independence. . . . They were strongly influenced by faith, just as many men were, but they reacted as women—in culturally determined gender roles to be sure, but roles that were no less political than the roles assumed by men” (54). In other words, the Revolution provided another means by which women could edge into the public sphere. Crane continues, saying, “The chain of persuasion that began with a sermon initially linked church to home. Yet the female world of the eighteenth century extended far beyond home and family, and most women were well situated to act as the intermediaries by which the ideology of rebellion passed from the pulpit to the community at large” (84).²

Richard D. Shiels’s article “The Feminization of American Congregationalism, 1730-1835” is a fascinating study of female membership in churches. He states that New England’s congregational churches “had long been predominantly female,” and this trend was only further intensified “in the two generations following the Declaration of Independence” (47). Shiels discusses the series of revivals from the 1730s through the Great Awakening and the Second Great Awakening, all “culminating in the revivals of 1831, which were more widespread and more intense than any others” (52). Women joined churches in great numbers during these revivals, and Shiels examines the reasons for this. As women were excluded from politics, commerce, and other male-oriented organizations, they turned to the place where their membership was allowed and even encouraged—churches. Women were supported in their church endeavors and were able to fill the roles that were expected of them, which included being moral, pious, and motherly. Shiels compares these roles of

² On women during the Revolution, also see Linda K. Kerber and Ruth H. Bloch.

women to the roles of clergymen, which further explains why these two groups of people would gravitate towards one another as their roles overlapped (60). Ann Douglas notes that “the nineteenth-century minister moved in a world of women. He preached mainly to women; he administered what sacraments he performed largely for women; he worked not only for them but with them, in mission and charity work of all kinds” (97). I will discuss this more when I examine the ties between Cooper’s David Gamut and Alice Munro, as well as the preaching roles of the Humphreys in Warner.

The notion that women had religious agency in nineteenth-century America does not mean that men and women’s roles were not stereotyped. In *Religion in America to 1865*, Bryan LeBeau states what many scholars acknowledge: “Men, according to most writers, were naturally strong in body and mind, aggressive and sexual. Women were innately weak, passive, emotional, religious and chaste. These were complimentary virtues and vices—men supported women, and women provided the sensitivity men lacked” (127). Women had roles in their homes rather than in politics and business, but these roles still carried their own power. While women were not supposed to be highly educated, they were supposed to be sufficiently educated to be effective mothers and wives. Over time, the roles of women as sensible and compassionate wives and mothers opened up opportunities for them to become reformers.

On reform movements, LeBeau states, “The first step involved women, a majority in many church congregations, participating actively in early-nineteenth-century religious and charitable enterprises. By the 1830s they moved into more secular causes: health reform, temperance, antislavery and campaigns to redeem prostitutes and curb licentiousness” (128). Religion was also becoming more domesticated, and the Second Great Awakening provided

opportunities for women to become preachers, “especially among Methodists, Baptists and Christians. Thereafter, women and ministers became allies in opposition to that from which they had been excluded” (130). As more women filled the pews of churches, male ministers also found themselves catering to the wants of female parishioners. Christ also assumed a more feminized role, as he was an example of love, forgiveness, and sacrifice (131). In *Taking Heaven by Storm*, John H. Wigger notes that “between 1786 and 1801 women constituted approximately 57 to 66 percent of the total Methodist membership. . . . In many places women took the lead in establishing the church and defining what Methodism would mean to them and their community. As a movement, Methodism was created as much by women as it was by men” (151). Continuing the discussion of Methodism, Wigger states, “The vast majority of women who regularly exhorted remained unlicensed, making their activities difficult to track. Nonetheless, women exhorters were clearly an accepted part of the Methodist tradition in many places during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries” (153). The role of women as preachers, in one form or another, is evident in Cooper, Apess, and Warner.

Religious revivals provide an important lens through which to view women’s roles in church membership. The colonists had adopted the British views of women as the pious and pure mother figures; men were not expected to be as religious as women. Even while revivals increased the numbers of male converts, the populations of women in churches continued to grow. Men’s numbers never equaled those of women, and increased fears of vice and impiety pushed the American people to advocate religion more. America needed a strong and virtuous Republic, and women were mothers who had the power to raise corrupt sons (Ruether and Keller 1-2). According to Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary

Skinner Keller, “Americans formulated a feminine ideal that would threaten neither republican nor male authority. By telling women that it was natural for them to be pious, men hoped that women would, in James Fordyce’s words, ‘act up to the best standard of [their] sex’” (3). Therefore, women were partially seen as being naturally pious and fit for religious life, but they were also seen as capable of corruption if they were not pushed firmly to be more religious.

Women and “Racial Others” as Speakers, Singers, Writers, and Readers

Camp and revival settings did not only allow outlets for women, but for a diverse range of people. Candy Gunther Brown notes the following:

The rigid boundaries that normally separated races, genders, age groups, and refined and vernacular styles loosened in the liminal space of the camp meeting. The rules of sacred time temporarily overcame the rules of everyday social interaction as whites and blacks ritually enacted a narrative structure in which all Christians were members of the family of God or pilgrims journeying together toward Canaan. (207)

These camp meetings provided a space in which disenfranchised people could use their voices and, for a time, be heard. After 1740, evangelists became increasingly interested in proselytizing to Native Americans and African Americans. Oral performance was important to evangelicalism in terms of proselytizing and such “elevation of the spoken word allowed native American and African American converts and preachers to adapt Christianity to their own spiritual practices and traditions, creating syncretic and hybridized forms of worship and belief” (Gustafson 75). The native Samson Occom and John Marrant—an “Indian missionary and [the] first ordained African American minister”—used their voices (101). Occom and

Apress became renowned for their rhetorical powers, and African American preachers “embraced the Pauline tradition of personal weakness transformed into rhetorical power . . . [and] directly addressed the speaker’s marginalization” (110). Nineteenth-century Methodism especially seemed to collapse the differences between diverse people as “Methodism, like Baptism and other ‘enthusiastic’ varieties of Christianity, articulated the grievances they all shared against the classes responsible for their situation and promoted understanding across racial lines” (Tiro 654-5).

According to Sandra Gustafson, “By the mid-eighteenth century, native Americans and African Americans manipulated verbal symbols as effectively as the colonists” (xxii). She notes the following, as well:

African American preachers and exhorters quickly became visible and controversial figures in the evangelical movement. Particularly in the South, African-influenced forms of worship radically shaped church life. The Awakening also set in motion the process that led to the formation of what in the nineteenth century became dynamic and culturally distinctive black churches. (76-7)

David S. Reynolds notes, “As with white women, a handful of African-American women pursued active preaching careers in early American Methodism” (153). Reynolds also states, “The vast majority of women who regularly exhorted remained unlicensed, making their activities difficult to track. Nonetheless, women exhorters were clearly an accepted part of the Methodist tradition in many places during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries” (153). Though women and “racially other” individuals did not have an easy time being accepted as preachers, opportunities were opening up for them.

Besides exhorting, though, women and “others” were also able to use their voices through singing. Candy Gunther Brown notes, “During the nineteenth century alone, publishers sponsored approximately 400,000 Christian hymns, the great majority of them evangelical in theme and tone, in 200 different languages” (190). These hymns were constantly present during worship, as Brown notes the following:

[M]inisters began and ended sermons with hymn singing, quoted from hymns while preaching, and even wrote hymns to reinforce sermon messages. Evangelicals used hymns during Sunday church services, at midweek interdenominational prayer and praise meetings, in private devotions and family worship, and at camp meetings, revivals, and gospel-song services. Children memorized hymns before they could read, and the aged recited hymns on their deathbeds. (191)

Besides preachers using hymns, many authors wrote across genres—“writing hymns, contributing to periodicals, and composing novels or memoirs. When Harriet Beecher Stowe realized the success of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, she . . . responded by writing a hymn . . . published in 1855” (191). In sum, hymns were an important part of everyday life for nineteenth-century Americans; they were a medium of rhetoric that allowed Christians to communicate in an epideictic mode—praising virtue and condemning vice.

The theme of hymnody recurs in Cooper, Apess, and Warner’s texts, and history shows us a feminized view of psalms that may explain these authors’ characterizations of female and feminized individuals. Richard D. Shiels says “nineteenth-century Christians put away traditional hymnody in which Christ called sinners to repent, and sang new songs in which a gentle, feminine Jesus invited wanderers to come home. In short, they glorified motherhood and sanctified the home. By doing so, they changed the nature of New England

religion, and they defined a lifestyle for religious women” (62). Songs were increasingly becoming feminized, and women were encouraged to sing at home and were also writing their own psalms, which adds another dimension to the feminization of psalmody.

Sylvia Brown discusses women songwriters, saying their religious writing had, until recently, been relegated to a marginal status. She uses the example of Cotton Mather, who used examples of women writers in his own writing (197). Puritan authorship for women was allowed, though it was conditional in that women had to write about the Word (198). Kay Norton also mentions that female contributors to writing affected the hymn traditions of Isaac Watts, George Whitefield, and Charles Wesley, among other psalmists of the early nineteenth century. Hymn collections from the nineteenth century included eighteenth century psalms by Anne Steele, Mrs. Vokes, Elizabeth Shirley Scott, and Sarah Slinn (51). In the nineteenth century, writing hymns was an acceptable vocation for women since the task befitted their sensitivity and tenderness; in particular, many female hymn writers were invalids and found an outlet for their pain through their writing (Murison 77). A woman—Fanny Crosby (1820-1915)—wrote over 8,000 published hymns, which is “the highest number attributed to any single writer” (Candy Gunther Brown 197).

Hymns written and sung by women also had a great effect on Native American converts where the matriarchal tradition was stronger (Norton 56). Hymns often expressed a reverence for the female virtues of wisdom and mercy, and God was often portrayed with motherly characteristics (57). Hymnody was increasingly recognized as being feminized, with women taking a greater role in writing hymns. This trend was under way as Cooper

wrote *The Last of the Mohicans*, and it had only been furthered in later years, when Apess and Warner would publish their texts.³

Alisa Clapp-Itnyre discusses the role of Victorian psalms in “improving the domestic sphere.” Singing songs would cultivate peace and morality in the home, as well as an artistic sensibility that would allow women to better spiritually serve their husbands (30). Women were encouraged to sing to their children and husbands—both teaching and calming nerves. Young women were also taught to sing so they could perhaps attract a husband through displaying their social graces (31-2). Yet women were increasingly doing more than singing at home as they ventured into the public sphere as singers and writers. While Victorian women faced much resistance at first, more women successfully became musicians as the nineteenth century progressed. Some women became singers, instrumentalists, and songwriters, established their own touring companies, and became choral conductors and choir trainers (35, 132-3). Though these women were the exception rather than the rule, their increasing roles in the public sphere through music are noteworthy. Candy Gunther Brown also notes, “Black singers borrowed a subset of the psalms and hymns sung by whites and adapted them to African worship traditions such as verbal and musical improvisation, call and response, the ring shout, and the rhythmic cadences of hand clapping and foot stomping” (208). The malleability of hymns and the common practice of singing across so many cultures allowed different groups of people to adapt singing to their own spiritual ends. Examining both congregational make-up and the art of singing and writing music, one sees that religion was becoming increasingly feminine.

³ Expanding later into the nineteenth century, Stephen Marini discusses how women were increasingly writing hymns in the years after the Civil War; he states, “Women wrote seven of the twenty most printed hymns of the postbellum century” (20). Marini also draws on Jane Hadden Hobbs’s “*I Sing for I Cannot Be Silent*.” Post-Civil War hymns displayed a greater rhetoric of vulnerability and intimacy that focused on private and domestic life (32).

Finally, women were also becoming increasingly educated, especially in matters tied to faith. Candy Gunther Brown notes that “the percentage of women attending female academies and seminaries between 1790 and 1830 was larger than the percentage of men enrolled in male academies and colleges” (407-8). These women were reading constantly, and by “giving books to reward accomplishment, in sponsoring literary societies, in using reading to forge bonds with students, and in sharing personal libraries, teachers at female academies and seminaries defined reading as a *female* enterprise” (410). African Americans were also becoming more literate. On African American literary societies, Brown notes, “Most strikingly, African Americans who founded literary societies in the North used them to mount challenges to slavery. When they published the poetry and prose they had written as members, when they held public exhibitions that included poetry readings, music, and speeches, they made all that they had learned serve the cause of freedom” (412).

Both men and women, though, could not access any books they wanted. As Cathy N. Davidson notes, “most books in America were imported rather than published at home; and only a limited number of books (chapbooks, almanacs, Bibles, and a few other steady sellers) were readily available to the populace at large. . . . As publishers also knew, some old Colonial standbys, Bibles and other traditional religious works such as *Pilgrim’s Progress* as well as the occasional political pamphlets and almanacs were often extraordinarily popular” (16-18). Women were exposed to more religious texts than “secular” texts, which I will especially discuss in chapter 3. For now, it is important to note that many readers were women—as Cooper’s Natty Bumppo argues—and reading goes hand-in-hand with education, which can give individuals more agency in society.

Concluding Remarks

Cooper, Apess, and Warner all treat religion in feminized ways. They depict central female characters who engage in religious activities that provide them with different forms of agency, from reading to singing to preaching—activities that often gave women more visible roles in public spheres. These Christian activities were not outside the sphere of womanhood; rather, women were expected to be the moral compasses of their families, true Christian models. Using their voices in Christian settings, women could claim increasing amounts of agency through the various ways in which they could begin to express themselves.

In Chapter 1, I discuss the role of religion in Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans*, looking specifically at hymnody and orality as they relate to the character of Alice Munro and, to a lesser extent, the feminized David Gamut and Mohican characters. In Cooper's text, the Munro sisters are often juxtaposed, where Cora is seen as the sister with more agency and intelligence than her younger sister, Alice. However, I wish to show how Alice is able to claim agency through her religion, particularly through singing hymns. While examining the text to show how Alice is the more religious sister, I evaluate how she uses her angelic status and her voice to counter the assumption that Alice is feeble and powerless.

In Chapter 2, I examine the roles of Pequot women in Christian preaching as they are depicted in William Apess's *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians*. In Apess's text, I will focus on both singing hymns and preaching—another oral, religious practice. Apess focuses mostly on female, Christian Indians in this text, which exemplifies how both women and non-whites could claim agency through Christianity even as they lacked power in other areas of their lives. Unlike Cooper's text, Apess's work shows female Pequots being

converted and discovering a type of religious agency—the erasure of despair and helplessness as well as the abilities to sing and preach to other Christians or unconverted individuals.

Chapter 3 discusses how Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* depicts a seemingly powerless young girl, Ellen Montgomery, as she grows stronger through her religious practices of reading Christian texts and singing hymns. I examine Ellen's religious struggles and eventual conversion, specifically discussing her use of very particular hymns and Bible verses throughout the text. As Warner has only recently been re-discovered, I hope to shed more light on her work than previous scholars have, discussing religion in detail whereas most other scholars focus on sentimentality in *The Wide, Wide World*. I argue that, while the young Ellen Montgomery has little choice in her life, her religion gives her power and steers her through her life, providing her with more agency and strength than she would otherwise have.

Finally, in my Conclusion I argue for further studies in nineteenth-century American literature—studies that focus on women's agency and allow us to rethink ways in which women were using their voices, both in written and oral forms. Ultimately, this study of Cooper, Apess, and Warner evinces the possibilities that exist for scholars of nineteenth-century American literature. These opportunities can extend to scholars of rhetoric and gender studies, as well. Starting with *The Last of the Mohicans*, *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians*, and *The Wide, Wide World*, we will see how women operated within societal conventions, claiming agency through Christian practices.

Chapter 1:

Texts and Voices in *The Last of the Mohicans*

Scholars have written more about James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* than on any of his other novels, and they have written about a variety of topics. Cooper's lengthy novel addresses issues of current critical interest, including race, gender, and nationalism, but a complete study of Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales must include an examination of his use of religion. Yet critics largely ignore religion when they write about the Leatherstocking Tales, and *The Last of the Mohicans* is no exception. Not surprisingly given the last several decades' interest in race, most scholars discuss race as it is depicted and discussed in the text—obviously in terms of the white versus native bifurcation that structures the novel's conflicts, but also the white versus black dichotomy that emerges from time to time in the figures of Cora (as the biracial Munro daughter) and Duncan Heyward (as the white southern gentleman).⁴ Numerous scholars also discuss gender in *The Last of the Mohicans*; however, while a handful address femininity,⁵ most are concerned with masculinity in the characters of Hawk-eye, Chingachgook, and Uncas.⁶ When women are discussed, they are largely described as powerless and, frankly, annoying characters.⁷ For example, Karen S. Sloan says that Cooper uses Alice “as a mouthpiece for vacuous femininity” (37). Yet women drive the plots of Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales, so they deserve more attention than they currently receive. Nina Baym notes that Cooper's

⁴ Some of the most recent studies include articles by Jinkyung Kim, Dean, McFarland, Harry Brown, and Yang.

⁵ Perhaps the most extensive study of femininity in Cooper's Tales is seen in Wegener, as well as Romero. While Person is not concerned with *The Last of the Mohicans*, his is a study that could be replicated for *Mohicans*, since Cooper's female “types” from *Mohicans* reappear in *The Deerslayer*.

⁶ Articles include those by Wilson, Dyer, Ghirardello, and Dennis.

⁷ See Baym's “The Women of Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales” (1971) for an excellent discussion of how critics have dismissed Cooper's women.

“[w]omen are . . . the chief signs, the language of social communication between males; in the exchange of women among themselves men create ties and bonds, the social structures that are their civilizations.” Baym goes on to say, “Though Cooper’s women have no power over his men, they are vital to man’s civilizations, and thus man has to take them along wherever he goes, and at whatever cost” (698). Women *may* be viewed as powerless commodities in Cooper’s texts as they are linked to certain male characters and are often captives; but Cooper’s women have more agency than the phrase “exchange of women” suggests, and they claim this agency through Christianity.

Although attention to the ways authors draw on religious discourses has proven generative in readings of many nineteenth-century authors (and particularly women authors), the topic of religion in *The Last of the Mohicans* largely remains untouched, and discussing both religion and femininity together appears to be a blind spot for Cooper scholars. Though scholars have largely ignored religious themes in Cooper’s novel, *The Last of the Mohicans* provides readers with several angles from which to scrutinize religion. In particular, the characters of Alice Munro—as the ideal, white Christian woman—and David Gamut—as the feminized psalmist—embody traditional views of Christianity and reflect the greater roles that women were taking in religious matters. The disenfranchised characters in this text—women, feminized men, and natives—use speech and music in order to claim agency. Christianity allowed and, at times, encouraged women and Native Americans to use language in order to praise God. While Cooper’s women and natives are often viewed as largely powerless characters, they possess agency through the ability to read and use their voices in song and speech; this ability sometimes helps the protagonists survive when their lives are in danger.

Alice Munro: Claiming Agency through Religion and Reading

Christianity in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century United States became increasingly relegated to a feminine sphere. The ideal Christian woman embodied certain characteristics that are outlined in John McWilliams's description of the typical "Fair Lady" from nineteenth-century novels; his characterization fits the make-up of Alice Munro: "blond-haired, blue-eyed, and fully Caucasian—[she] represents both the value of civil society and a curious innocence about it. Her responses are passive and her ideas conventional; she is physically weak, deferential to males, easily shocked, but innately decent." In other words, she is a pure, innocent, and passive Christian in every way (68). According to this definition, Cooper is staying within the borders of convention as he constructs Alice Munro, and her religious practices—as viewed from the perspective of America's Christian history—are also conventional.⁸

Modern readers may view Alice Munro as a fairly unimportant character, especially when she is compared to her more strong-willed sister, Cora. However, Alice fills several roles in the text as a white woman, a Christian, and a captive. At least one critic goes so far as to portray Alice as the heroine of *The Last of the Mohicans* since she is the object of the "technical hero's affection" (Wegener 152). Though Cora Munro has more heroic qualities than her sister, Alice is an important figure in this novel and represents the ideal woman. Alice has more traditional and, perhaps, expected feminine qualities for Cooper's time. She is also the religious sister in the text, though Signe O. Wegener contends that *The Last of the Mohicans* de-emphasizes Alice's religion. She states, "Yet where he in earlier works had

⁸ Since Cooper's father was of a plain Quaker lineage, Cooper may be drawing upon Quakerism as well as the popular Puritanism of the northern colonies as he constructs his women (Delbanco 196). Religious scholar Howard W. Hintz notes that Natty Bumppo—the hero of the *Leatherstocking Tales*—and other characters from the *Tales* evince Quaker influences (41-3). Cooper's discussion of natural gifts, spiritual meditation, inner light, and general benevolence towards Native Americans are all examples of Cooper's Quaker upbringing (43-4).

emphasized the heroine's piety and domesticity, Cooper in this novel downplays those elements, focusing instead on expressions of filial duty." She also says that the "text contains few direct examples of the daughters' piety" (152).

Yet, contrary to what Wegener argues, Alice is shown to be religious in numerous ways, for example, through her characterization and descriptions. For instance, when the protagonists are hiding in a cave, Heyward looks at Cora and believes "that piety had never worn a form so lovely, as it had now assumed in the youthful person of Alice." Her eyes glow radiantly, and her soul seems "ready and anxious to pour out its thanksgivings" (100). Here, as elsewhere, Alice takes the form of an angelic figure. Soon after, when Cora tells her of Magua's wishes to take Cora to his home, Alice slumps lifelessly against a tree. The narrator describes how "her head dropped upon her bosom, and her whole person seemed suspended against the tree, looking like some beautiful emblem of the wounded delicacy of her sex, devoid of animation, and yet keenly conscious" (125). Reading this passage, one may see the image of Christ hanging from the cross. Alice is later described as rising from her knees with "soft, dove-like eyes" that sparkle "with the rays of hope" while she cries out in the name of her father (131). This image reinforces the idea that Alice is Christ-like or angelic. After escaping this initial capture, Alice and Cora offer "up their thanksgivings for past mercies" and petition "for a continuance of the Divine favour throughout the coming night" (145). Munro later describes his daughters as "'angel like'" (253), which echoes his earlier statement to Heyward that Alice's mother was an angel and "'a saint in heaven'" (181). Finally, at Cora and Uncas's funeral, the Delaware women describe the surviving Alice as being as pure, white, brilliant, and delicate as snow. Her eyes are compared "to the

blue vault of the heavens” (387). All of these characterizations infuse Alice with Christ-like, angelic qualities.

Alice also takes on an angelic air at the end of the book as she is rescued. When Heyward reaches Alice, her face seems to glow (294). As Heyward begins to profess his love for her and will ask for her hand in marriage, Alice stops him short. She says, ““give me the sacred presence and the holy sanction of that parent, before you urge me farther”” (295). She wishes for her father’s consent, but she refers to him in spiritual terms. Not only do we see how important Alice’s spirituality is to her, but we may also see this reference to her holy parent as a representation of God; perhaps she needs to both speak to her father and pray to God before she can commit her love to Heyward. When Cora leaves Heyward at the end, she tells him to care for her sister, who has a soul that is as ““pure and spotless as her skin!”” (356).

In addition to the overt references to her piety, Cooper establishes Alice as religious in the ways that she uses her voice in prayer and song. Though Wegener might contend that Cooper does not draw much attention to Alice’s religion, her faith is clear as she interacts with David Gamut. According to Joanna Brooks, “gamuts” were “hymnals or instructional tune books” (69). Cooper is clearly playing with the hymnal, or gamut, as he introduces us to the character of David Gamut, the psalmist and ministerial figure in the novel. Alice and David Gamut are tied together in the text because they are both highly feminized and religious. Richard D. Shiels compares the roles of women to the roles of clergymen—both groups being responsible for maintaining a pious atmosphere at home and at church, respectively. Noting these similar roles helps explain why women and clergymen would gravitate towards one another (60). Ann Douglas also compares women to clergymen, both

being characterized by modesty, frailty, and moral pursuits (88-9). The feminized Gamut and the angelic Alice are perfect companions.

Alice is excited to have Gamut join their group because of his musical abilities. She invites Gamut to accompany her in their “favourite pursuit”—singing—for which she claims to have a talent (30). Richard D. Shiels notes that hymns often expressed a reverence for the female virtues of wisdom and mercy, and God was often portrayed with motherly characteristics (57). Shiels says “nineteenth-century Christians put away traditional hymnody in which Christ called sinners to repent, and sang new songs in which a gentle, feminine Jesus invited wanderers to come home. In short, they glorified motherhood and sanctified the home. By doing so, they changed the nature of New England religion, and they defined a lifestyle for religious women” (62). Songs were increasingly feminized, and the ability to be religious opened up opportunities for women to write religious works, such as hymns; writing, in turn, gave women a sense of agency and purpose. When discussing the marginal status of women’s religious writing pre-twentieth century, Sylvia Brown illustrates the influence of women by citing the example of Cotton Mather, who used musical samples from women writers in his own writing (197). Puritan authorship for women was allowed, but women were pressured to write about God and the Word (198).⁹ Kay Norton also mentions that women’s contributions to writing affected the hymn traditions of Isaac Watts, George Whitefield, and Charles Wesley, among other psalmists of the early nineteenth century. Hymn collections from the nineteenth century included eighteenth-century psalms by Anne Steele, Mrs. Vokes, Elizabeth Shirley Scott, and Sarah Slinn (51). In the nineteenth century, writing hymns was an acceptable vocation for women since the task befitted their

⁹ Note that even captivity narratives such as Mary Rowlandson’s discuss the strength these Christian women gain through God, including the tools and comfort He gives them for survival.

sensitivity and tenderness. Hymnody was increasingly recognized as being feminized, with women taking a greater role in writing hymns (Marini 19). This trend was under way as Cooper wrote *The Last of the Mohicans*, and it was only furthered in later years. Knowing this history of psalmody, it is no wonder that Alice has a talent for singing.

Throughout Cooper's text, Alice is either listening intently as Gamut sings or singing along with him while the other characters either listen or grow tense that their enemies will hear the noises. A noteworthy passage describes the party as Gamut and Alice are given permission from Heyward to sing. The narrator says, "Encouraged by [Heyward's] opinion, Alice did what her pious inclinations and her keen relish for gentle sounds, had before so strongly urged. The book was open at a hymn not ill adapted to their situation, and in which the poet, no longer goaded by his desire to excel the inspired King of Israel, had discovered some chastened and respectable powers." Cora sings in support of her sister, and their voices hover in "holy excitement" over the psalm book (68). This passage rings with Christian allusions, and readers must note that the characters sing hymns rather than secular tunes.

As discussed in the Introduction, Puritan women were granted an often unrecognized degree of respect for their voices in religious matters. Sylvia Brown notes that Puritan women were responsible for increasing the number of "godly" individuals, converting their husbands and bringing their children into the faith, as mothers were the first and most influential religious instructors in family units (191). John McWilliams states that, since it was desirable for women to use their voices well, "middle- and upper-class women were educated to acquire foreign languages and knowledge of the fine arts, including literature" (67). According to McWilliams, Cooper's romantic texts "are in part his attempt to reclaim and redirect the interests of existing readership among women" (14). The acts of reading and

writing became parts of the feminine sphere, which is evinced in Cooper's text as he presents his female characters and femininity to his audience. Expecting some women to be schooled in literature and to be the educators of their children, Cooper anticipates that women will read his text. The first group of readers he addresses in his preface is that of women, whom he hopes will not be frightened as they read his tale (6). Here, Cooper acknowledges the role of women as readers. In "Vanishing Americans: Gender, Empire, and New Historicism," Lora Romero discusses how Cooper ties women to texts and language as she states the following:

While perhaps Cooper, like Hawk-eye, believes that God never intended that *man* privilege language at the expense of the development of the body, both seem to believe that the Supreme Being intended that *woman* do so. This is suggested by Cooper's habitual association of feminine control over education in the settlements with both the proliferation of words and with precipitous behavior. (394, emphasis original)

Man's book is the book of nature, which is learned through paternal apprenticeship, while reading books is a maternal system (399). The maternal nature of reading books is evident in Cooper's text in the actions of Alice Munro.

Throughout the novel, Alice is tied to both books and voices, or speech. Alice is tied to reading both directly through her actions and words and indirectly through being a woman. For instance, she feels certain that the savagery of which she has read will not take place as long as Uncas is nearby (Cooper 62). Hawk-eye distances men from books when he equates writing with being able to lie, since a man who writes may tell falsehoods because he does not have to face his comrades and enemies and speak to them. Men who learn to write are those who spend too many days "among the women, in learning the names of black marks"

instead of learning from their fathers in nature (37). Perhaps the most notable reference to Hawk-eye's thoughts on books occurs when Gamut asks Hawk-eye to support his arguments with scriptural references. Hawk-eye exclaims the following:

Book! . . . do you take me for a whimpering boy, at the apron string of one of your old gals; and this good rifle on my knee for the feather of a goose's wing, my ox's horn for a bottle of ink, and my leathern pouch for a cross-barred handkercher to carry my dinner! Book! what have such as I, who am a warrior of the wilderness, though a man without a cross, to do with books! I never read but in one [, the wilderness], and the words that are written there are too simple and too plain to need much schooling. (134)

Hawk-eye suggests that, for Gamut to mention books, the psalmist must be mistaking him for a "whimpering boy" instead of a grown warrior; Hawk-eye also groups books with writing as he references a feather pen and ink bottle. As a hunter, he distances himself from the tools of education, which belong at home with "old gals" in aprons. Later, he praises Uncas because he learns from experience and will always respect his father for having more years behind him; a man who reads a book forgets this respect as he surpasses his father with book knowledge (242). As Alice reads from Gamut's hymnal, one sees the ties between women and education. Men and women were culturally allowed to read, but the realm of reading books became increasingly the realm of women.

Both Alice and Cora read aloud in this text. Alice reads Gamut's hymnal more often and is the primary female singer in the text, but Cora uses her voice as well. Alice has religious agency as the ideal, white Christian woman; religion gives Alice a voice that she might not have otherwise, because she is not as witty and adventurous as Cora. When some

of her speech is ignored, Alice can captivate her audience by singing psalms; when she lacks the physical strength to fight her captors, she feels power in the ability to lift her voice to God in prayer. Cora, however, is the older and more headstrong sister; she engages in conversation with the men more, and she is often the voice of reason in the text. Her rationality gives her agency, and her voice helps define her. For instance, Cooper writes, “‘Duncan!’ said the tremulous voice of Cora” (78). This syntax is interesting because *Cora* does not speak out to Duncan; her *voice* does. Her voice is somewhat personified in this line. Also, Hawk-eye later exclaims, “‘There is reason in her words! . . . ay, and they bear the spirit of christianity. . . . Chingachgook! Uncas! hear you the talk of the dark-eyed woman!’” (90). Reason, Christianity, and words are entwined, and Cora possesses them all. She is shown reading the hymnal and using her voice through song (68), but readers also know that she is fluent in French. Her knowledge of French helps the protagonists evade a French soldier in the woods (155), and Cooper is drawing on the convention of teaching women foreign languages as part of their genteel education.

Alice does not have this kind of agency because she is more timid and frail. Yet, through song, she can captivate the people around her. Her angelic innocence wins over her companions even though she has a tendency to faint and, therefore, slow down the group. Her innocence also spares her from the sexual advances of Magua, who favors the dark beauty and headstrong demeanor of Cora. While Heyward worries that Alice is in distress because she is separated from her sister, Gamut assures Heyward that “‘so far as praise and thanksgiving in psalmody can temper the spirit in affliction, she has not suffered.’” Though sad, Alice is able to smile at times when she sings with Gamut (Cooper 253); in other words,

her religion gets her through her captivity.¹⁰ Ultimately, Alice is the survivor in the text, and she ends up with Heyward whereas Cora dies.

One of the first moments that readers have with Alice involves her suspicion of the guide, Magua—a Huron who double-crosses Heyward and the British. Alice asks Duncan Heyward to speak to Magua so she may judge his character by the sound of his voice. She says, ““Will you not speak to him, Major Heyward, that I may hear his tones? Foolish though it may be, you have often heard me avow my faith in the tones of the human voice!”” (Cooper 26). Here, Alice admits that one’s voice can betray a sense of morality or immorality, and she ties this sense to her faith. She notes that her statement might be foolish but, in this instance, Alice’s suspicions are grounded. Heyward and Cora trust Magua, which basically indicates that they ignore Alice’s suspicions. Yet Cora and Heyward—as well as Cooper’s audience—soon find out that Alice is correct; Magua cannot be trusted. This is one example Cooper gives his readers of how unprepared Heyward is for many of his encounters in this tale, even though Heyward is supposed to be the quintessential white male. Furthermore, though Heyward and Cora do not take heed of Alice’s suspicions towards Magua, Hawk-eye, Chingachgook, and Uncas confirm her uneasiness as they enter the plot—Magua is a traitor. Hawk-eye is assured of this because of Magua’s ““knavish look, and by his paint”” rather than by his voice (46). For Alice, speech is telling, and it is an important area of the woman’s realm even as women are cautioned about speaking too much. For example, when Alice pokes fun at Heyward for disappearing as they run for Fort William Henry, she rescinds her words for fear of having hurt Heyward, exclaiming, ““did I think this

¹⁰ For an extreme case in which one of Cooper’s angelic characters uses religion to survive amongst the Mingoos, see the character of Hetty Hutter in *The Deerslayer*. Several times, she enters the Mingo camp knowing that God will protect her as she clutches her Bible to her breast. The Mingoos spare her because of her piety and feeble-mindedness, though she is accidentally killed during a war at the end of the novel.

idle tongue of mine had pained you, I would silence it for ever!" (170). This passage evinces how women walked a fine line between speaking moderately and speaking excessively.

Men are characterized as having "better gifts" than using their voices, whereas women are described as speaking too much, often being characterized as prattling and babbling. For instance, Magua says, "the pale-faces are prattling women" (105). Hawk-eye later urges the men to be "ready to undertake our work like men, and not like babbling women, or eager boys'" (215). Both men and women have voices in this text, but women's voices are excessive and unrestrained, while women are also infantilized by being compared to children. A close reading towards the end of the text reveals Tamenund's statement, "Men speak not twice'" when Heyward asks him to reconsider his decision to let Magua take Cora (353). The implication is that women may speak more than twice, being excessive talkers; men, however, restrain their voices and are decisive, knowing how to use their words in rational and economical ways.

David Gamut: The Feminized Religious Male

Scholars do not often discuss the psalmist, David Gamut. Signe O. Wegener briefly mentions him, saying he is "socially inept" (154). More recently, Karen S. Sloan has discussed Gamut in highly disparaging detail. Sloan calls Gamut "[a] constant encumbrance on the bloody battlefield of a colonial war" (34), "largely superfluous to the plot" (36), and "a catalyst of danger to the other characters" (38). Gamut acts with "extremism expressing itself in any number of inappropriate and even dangerous ways. . . . [and his] misplaced confidence in psalmody makes him an unwitting traitor on a battlefield strewn with human carnage" (38). While Gamut is certainly awkward and does not help Hawk-eye battle the

Mingoes in hand-to-hand combat, he is not as inept, superfluous, or dangerous as Wegener and Sloan state. I argue that Gamut, the feminized psalmist, has a great deal of agency through his singing and helps the other protagonists survive on numerous occasions.

David Gamut is relegated to the feminine sphere because he sings and is a devoutly pious male. He is content to fill this role, as he agrees to watch over Cora and Alice when Fort William Henry is being evacuated. He says to Heyward, “I have found much that is comely and melodious in the maidens, and it is fitting that we, who have consorted in so much peril, should abide together in peace” (195). Yet Hawk-eye is not as comfortable with Gamut’s feminine qualities. He berates Gamut for being a singer and reasons that he must have “fallen into the hands of some silly woman” to have been raised as a singer instead of as a woodsman, learning in and from the forest (254). Since Gamut is a singer, Hawk-eye views him as worthless in the pursuits of men. He says Gamut “might be better employed” (67) and refers to him as “the weak soul, who passes his days in singing” (72). When a bullet grazes Gamut and he falls unconscious during battle, Hawk-eye says the wound is “proof that a man may be born with too long a tongue” (77). Hawk-eye later advises Gamut to sell his tuning pipe and buy a gun (132). When Hawk-eye discovers that Gamut has followed the captive women, he says with contempt that Gamut will not be able to help the women since he can only sing (212). Following Gamut’s trail, Hawk-eye mocks the psalmist’s light tread, saying, “a man who uses his throat altogether, can hardly give his legs a proper training” (247). Catching up with Gamut, Hawk-eye tells him, “The Lord never intended that the man should place all his endeavors in his throat, to the neglect of other and better gifts! But he has fallen into the hands of some silly woman, when he should have been gathering his education under a blue sky, and among the beauties of the forest” (254).

Perhaps the most intriguing way in which Gamut is feminized is when he is removed from the numbers of the men in his group on two occasions. First, as Magua flees from them in the beginning and Hawk-eye is only able to wound him, Heyward suggests they follow Magua. He reasons, ““We are four able bodies, to one wounded man!”” (52). The “able bodies” include Heyward, Hawk-eye, Chingachgook, and Uncas; Gamut and the women are excluded. Second, as the group tries to escape the Mingoes towards the end of the novel, Hawk-eye says, ““What shall we do with the Mingoes at the door! They count six, and this singer is as good as nothing”” (307). Gamut is worthless as a man because he is a singer, and his singing defines him as Hawk-eye refers to him by his vocation rather than by his name.

Yet, despite Hawk-eye’s constant criticism, Cooper shows how singing gives a person agency in various ways. Hawk-eye believes that singing weakens a person, but the protagonists benefit from psalmody time and again. An account of the plot’s details shows how Gamut survives through singing and how the other protagonists benefit, as well. At the beginning of the text, readers gain a sense of Gamut’s autonomy, as he is able to walk around the military campsite while the soldiers stand “in deference to the quarters of Webb” (22). Gamut walks freely, commenting on the state of the horses. Soon after, singing aids Gamut, allowing him to enter the group of travelers at the beginning of the text. He follows the group and expresses a wish to join them in “social communion,” but Heyward is loath to welcome him, saying his decision to join them is “arbitrary, if not a hasty decision” (29). However, Alice’s enthusiasm for Gamut’s vocation forces the other party members to comply. Without the gift of singing, perhaps Gamut would not have been allowed into the group; then Gamut would have no literary existence, since his character must come to life within the larger group.

After this scene, singing allows Gamut—and the sisters—to survive during the slaughter scene; because he starts singing, the natives do not kill him but allow him to have agency. Cooper describes the scene as follows:

Then raising his voice to its highest tones, he poured out a strain so powerful as to be heard, even amid the din of that bloody field. More than one savage rushed towards them, thinking to rifle the unprotected sisters of their attire, and bear away their scalps; but when they found this strange and unmoved figure, rivetted [*sic*] to his post, they paused to listen. Astonishment soon changed to admiration, and they passed on to other, and less courageous victims, openly expressing their satisfaction at the firmness with which the white warrior sung his death song. (201)

While Hawk-eye would have readers believe that Gamut is not a brave warrior, Cooper describes the effects that the “white warrior” Gamut has on the Mingoes as inspiring “admiration.” Just as Hawk-eye uses his rifle as a weapon, Gamut’s tuning pipe is a different kind of weapon, described at the beginning of the text as something that could be mistaken for an “unknown implement of war,” which also characterizes Gamut as a warrior in his own right (21). Because of his odd gift of song that intrigues the Mingoes, Gamut can follow the captive Cora and Alice and live with the Mingoes. Later, Hawk-eye almost shoots Gamut but sees Gamut’s tuning pipe before pulling the trigger. This causes Hawk-eye to lower his weapon, showing how song has again saved Gamut’s life (364).

However, Gamut is not the only person to benefit from his singing talents. Socially, the other protagonists benefit from his singing simply because they enjoy his voice. Whites and natives are even hesitant to ever interrupt Gamut when he sings, which lends some authority to Gamut’s character (96, 135, 195, 288, 390). When he sings, the others listen and

wait until he is done. Besides social benefits to the group, though, Gamut's singing benefits the protagonists during three key moments not yet discussed. First, his tuning pipe is found on the trail after the slaughter, which allows the other men to keep on the trail of the captives (212). Second, Gamut's mobility in the Mingo camp allows him to fill in the other men about the situation in the camp. He can help Heyward enter the camp since the Mingoes do not question Gamut about his friend (258). He is also able to stay close to Alice and sing with her, which calms her nerves and pleases the ears of the Mingoes (253). Third, Hawk-eye is able to disguise himself as Gamut while Gamut pretends to be Uncas, held captive; Uncas puts on a shaman's bear costume, and he and Hawk-eye leave the Mingo camp with Hawk-eye singing as Gamut would (310). Because the Mingoes do not question Gamut's actions or movements in the camp, Hawk-eye is able to use Gamut's mobility by pretending to be him.

Considering all of these events, Cooper works singing into the text in a way that shows the power of Gamut and his singing ability. In many ways, Gamut moves the plot along as his singing gives him agency in the Mingo camp. Yet Hawk-eye still frowns on the idea of a man singing. He enjoys listening to the songs and even cries upon first hearing Gamut and Alice sing (68-9); he characterizes nature in terms of song, with water and wind often harmonizing throughout the text; he uses the "music" of the crow to signal to his friends (252); he characterizes the sound of his gun in terms of song, with the crack of the rifle being a "note" (252); he even uses poetic, rhythmic language to persuade Chingachgook and Uncas—speech that is comparable to musical composition. Hawk-eye even allows himself to sing when he is disguised as a bear, echoing Gamut's song (288) and when he pretends to be Gamut in order to rescue Uncas (310). Hawk-eye is not comfortable singing

when he is himself, but being in costumes allows him to do so. He contradicts himself as he criticizes singing and then uses it as a descriptive device or survival tool. Hawk-eye can allow himself to enjoy songs and use psalmody when he needs to fool the Mingoes, but he would never allow himself to sing as a hobby or occupation. He may not realize how important song is in his life, but Cooper gives his readers evidence that allows them to register the importance of music even to those who denigrate it.

Native Americans as Speakers and Singers

Of course, voices and singing are not only important to white women and feminized white men. Natives in the text also use their voices to obtain agency in the text. Female natives are particularly characterized as speakers in both the Mohican and Mingo camps. For instance, when Uncas is captured, a Mingo woman berates him with words while everyone else watches. She is a “hag” who says the Delawares are ““a race of women.”” The laughter that breaks out is that of the younger females, which is full of “musical merriment.” The warriors “stalked in the back ground, silent and sullen observers of the scene” (272). Here Cooper shows us that women are the talkers while the men are more stoical in such circumstances. The end of the novel also shows ties between women and speech. During the final chase, Uncas yells at Magua. Since the Mingoes have been calling the Mohicans women, Uncas says, ““a Delaware girl calls stay!”” (379). This is noteworthy since Uncas describes himself as a female while he yells, and he even lets Magua know that he is calling out orders.

Speech is not solely relegated to the woman’s sphere, though. Male natives such as Uncas and, particularly, Magua stand out among the other native men for their unique

speaking abilities. Here Cooper seems to be making a distinction between “prattling” and oration. Women are in danger of speaking too much whereas men, when they do speak, are admired for speaking well. Uncas speaks more towards the end of the novel, where the reader sees that he is turning into a true warrior, emerging from adolescence. Meanwhile, Magua evinces his rhetorical skills throughout the text, showing that he knows when it is more strategic for him to be silent and when he must move his followers through speech. Even Hawk-eye becomes a Magua-like orator when he discusses strategies with Chingachgook and Uncas, using arm motions and “all the arts of native eloquence” while speaking in order to captivate his listeners (226-7). So, while white and native women are often speaking in Cooper’s text, it is not unmanly for a warrior to be an effective rhetor when the time is right.

Discussing native oratory, Sandra M. Gustafson notes, “By the mid-eighteenth century, native Americans and African Americans manipulated verbal symbols as effectively as the colonists. The performance semiotic was both flexible and widely understood in the colonies and the early republic” (xxii). White oration practices and techniques were not foreign to marginalized groups, so they were able to adapt their performance styles to white standards. Gustafson notes that converting natives after 1740 was successful to an unprecedented degree because “[w]hite evangelicals produced forms of worship and lay participation more oriented toward the spoken word. . . Such elevation of the spoken word allowed native American and African American converts and preachers to adapt Christianity to their own spiritual practices and traditions, creating syncretic and hybridized forms of worship and belief” (75). Marginalized people could “convert a position of cultural impotence into one of power” through oratory (110). Oral rhetoric was malleable and

offered avenues through which natives could become more powerful in public spheres.

Gustafson also says, “Colonial American viewers reevaluated the physical drama of native oratory in light of the new style of performance, praising the gestures and movements of Indian speakers that so fascinated and disturbed early English observers such as John Smith” (118). Stated similarly, “When joined to republican thought, such celebrations of native eloquence helped to shape a view of natural liberty linked to the figure of the savage speaker who exerts power through persuasion rather than commands, a view that emerged at the center of Revolutionary ideology” (139). The intimidating native with his guttural noises and menacing gestures was becoming a respected figure by the time in which Cooper’s novel is set—and certainly by the time that Cooper writes *The Last of the Mohicans*.

Yet not all of the white characters stand in awe of the voices and songs of natives. Gamut continually berates the Mingoes for not singing hymns, while the Mohicans engage in songs to rouse themselves to battle and to bury Uncas and Cora. When Hawk-eye asks Gamut about the Mingoes with whom he has been living, Gamut says, ““They never join their voices in praise, and it would seem that they are among the profanest of the idolatrous”” (256). Shortly after, Gamut again bemoans the lack of song among the Mingoes, saying the following:

It is rather a joy than labour to the spirit, to lift up the voice in praise; but sadly do these boys abuse their gifts! Rarely have I found any of their age, on whom nature has so freely bestowed the elements of psalmody; and surely, surely, there are none who neglect them more. Three nights have I now tarried here, and three several times have I assembled the urchins to join in sacred song, and as often have they responded to my efforts with whoopings and howlings that have chilled my soul! (262)

The reader understands that the natives are singing, but Gamut only recognizes religious songs as actual music. Anything else is profane “whoopings.” If Heyward sang some of the profane songs he knows, Gamut would assumedly reject these songs as not being “real” music, as well. So while Gamut does not recognize native songs as music, the reader still understands that natives are singing in Cooper’s text, to express joy and sorrow and to call each other to battle.

In Cooper’s text, readers see native women enacting the roles of religious speakers and singers. In her book, *To Do Good to My Indian Brethren*, Laura J. Murray discusses the journals of Joseph Johnson; his journals show little religious activity on the part of native women *except* for singing. In the nineteenth century, Mohican women became the leaders of religious communities (44). Cooper demonstrates this at the end of his novel when Uncas and Cora are buried; during this scene, young girls speak about their virtues at length while the men listen (385-6). They speak and sing, with choruses composed of wails of grief (387). Historians note that some Mohicans who converted to Christianity were drawn to Christian religious practices; the singing and dancing of Christian churches and revival activities were not foreign to natives and their own religious practices. Murray comments on the work of historian William Simmons, saying, “Simmons contends that the flamboyant performance style of the itinerant preachers would have appealed to people coming from a tradition of shamanistic religion, singing, and dancing. Indeed, New Light religion drew more of its power from the spoken word than did the more scriptural Old Light religion” (42).

Echoing Murray, Joanna Brooks and W. DeLoss Love also state that natives adopted psalmody into their existing religious practices, which already involved singing, performance, rhythm, and instrumentation. They could even take Christian hymns and alter

them to conform to their own religious beliefs, thereby using hymns for their own means (54-5). Hymns were a tool of agency, just as they provided agency for white women; natives and women could both be the artists and manipulators of language and communication. Natives were allowed to have this agency because the hymns were seen as Christian, and white colonists were drawn to the figure of the native singing and performing (64). While Cooper's Mohicans are not Christians, this historical context suggests that Mohicans frequently sang and otherwise performed orally. It also helps explain why Cooper and his white characters are so enthralled by the performances of the native characters, as whites were "drawn" to performing natives.

Mohican women are not the only singers in Cooper's text. During the funeral, a stern and renowned warrior begins to praise Uncas. Cooper says, "He was succeeded by others, in due order, until most of the high and gifted men of the nation had sung or spoken their tribute of praise over the manes of the deceased chief" (388). White manhood does not include singing songs of worship; in fact, Alice tells Gamut in the beginning of the text that Heyward, as a soldier, is only used to profane songs (31). Amongst the Mohicans, though, the best warriors sing just as the women do, and their manhood is not diminished. The fact that native men sing while white men do *not* suggests that Cooper is feminizing native men. While there is an aspect of feminization towards male natives, men such as Chingachgook, Uncas, and Magua seem more majestic and heroic than feminine, even when they are singing. Masculine white men may feel uncomfortable singing anything other than "profane" songs, but native men who sing are not relegated to the sphere of women.

Earlier, I established that Uncas is a great orator and warrior. As a warrior, Uncas uses a song to rally his followers in the final battle. His voice rivals "the melody of birds,"

and Cooper calls Uncas's song "a sort of invocation, or hymn, to the deity" (359). A Lenape chief joins Uncas, and the other warriors join in song and dance as they prepare for war (360). Finally, the women exit their lodges with "songs of joy and . . . lamentations, so strangely mingled" (361). As a white, masculine man, Hawk-eye will not join in by singing, as he "was too much accustomed to the war-song and the enlistment of the natives, to betray any interest in the passing scene" (361). Yet native males, like white and native women, are attracted to the beauty, rhythm, and malleability of music. Cooper even uses music to distinguish between the "good" and "bad" natives.

Part of Uncas's appeal is that he is eloquent and majestic. When he speaks English, his voice is "mild and musical" (66). When Uncas shows defiance towards the Mingo, he speaks "in the music of the Delawares" (282). Uncas's voice is again described as "musical" as he reveals his identity to Tamend (347). His musical voice gives him power—the power to compel his listeners into action. Magua has the same power of eloquence, but he is the antagonist. Like a musician, Magua speaks in attempts to "strike every chord" of the hearts of his listeners (283). While Magua's followers are "lolling savages," he can command their attention with his eloquence (120). The native leaders are those who speak and sing well; their voices provide them with the agency they need to invite action in the text.

Concluding Remarks

From these characterizations, Cooper tells readers that the individuals most admired are those who speak well, which includes singing or having a song-like voice. Hawk-eye, Uncas, and Magua are all effective orators. Even though Magua is the enemy, readers are still compelled to respect him for his gift of eloquence. Other characters (and readers) respect Cora as a voice of reason in the text, and the characters respect Alice and Gamut for their beautiful singing voices.

In sum, religion is not only present throughout the text; it allows often powerless individuals a sense of autonomy and agency. Cooper does not stray from conventions of his time but, rather, provides his readers with an accurate depiction of how feminized and infantilized characters were both expected to use their voices and praised for doing so. Masculine, white manhood was not characterized by worshipful singing, and masculine men did not have to use their voices in these ways to have autonomy—they were already the powerful figures in society. As they allowed and even encouraged women and natives to be religious, they gave these disenfranchised groups avenues for using and modifying language. This power over words, both spoken and sung, gave agency to people who struggled for power and acceptance. Many of Cooper's characters may seem powerless at a single glance, but through evaluating their speeches and songs, readers discover that Cooper lends them a great deal of agency.

Chapter 2:

The Experiences of Five Christian Indians: The Primacy of Native Women

Until about the last fifteen years, scholars have not given William Apess a great amount of attention.¹¹ His career is important because of his work as a writer and preacher, struggling to maneuver in a white America while being a Pequot. Despite his intriguing life, in which he tried to consolidate his identities in the Christian and native communities, many aspects of his works have gone unstudied. Before the more recent surge in Apess scholarship, Carolyn Haynes noted, “One possible reason for the paucity of Apess scholarship may be his pervasive and unabashed use of Protestant rhetoric” (25). I argue, along with a number of other critics, that Apess’s rhetoric can interest rather than repel scholars, and it can open up new ways to evaluate Apess’s works. Moreover, studying *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians* offers scholars five examples of native conversion narratives, as well as “a rare glimpse into the lives of Pequot women in the early nineteenth century” (Gussman, “The Politics” 101).

Most scholarship discusses Apess’s *A Son of the Forest* (1831), “An Indian’s Looking Glass for the White Man,” which comes at the end of *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians of the Pequot Tribe* (1833), and *Eulogy on King Philip, as Pronounced at the Odeon*,

¹¹ Hilary E. Wyss notes that native writers prior to Apess also deserve more attention and get even less attention than Apess. Wyss mentions the writer and preacher, Joseph Papenau, who preached at Falmouth and Bourne in the mid-eighteenth century (2), as well as Samson Occom, who was elected as the “spiritual guide” of Natives in New Stockbridge and Brotherton (145), highlighting the tradition of native preaching. She states that “there is a tradition of Native American life writing that precedes Apess by almost 150 years. This writing takes the form of letters, journal entries, and religious confessions. It is also often embedded in the published tracts of colonial missionaries who quote Native converts at length. Taken together, these materials, including sermons and even cultural histories, define the unique identity and cultural position of the Christianized Native American in colonial American society” (4). Also see Theda Perdue’s chapter on Catharine Brown in *Sifters*; Brown was a Cherokee woman who converted to Christianity and then worked to convert others. Her story greatly resembles the stories of the women in *Experiences*, suggesting a tradition of female native converts who were converting other natives.

in *Federal Street, Boston* (1836). Discussions of Apess tend to dwell on his oratory, religion, and masculinity.¹² Oddly, masculinity is often the topic of the sparse amount of scholarship on *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians* even though four of Apess's five native subjects are women.¹³ Apess's choice to write about four native *women* who converted to Christianity and then became quite involved in the Christian community, even preaching and proselytizing, deserves further consideration.

Experiences begins with Apess's telling of his own conversion, followed by Apess's wife, Mary, who writes the second section of *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians*. Mary Apess's story is followed by Apess's biographies of Hannah Caleb, Sally George, and Anne Wampy.¹⁴ Each conversion narrative goes through the typical conventions of the Puritan conversion narrative, with a few differences. Conventionally, these narratives involve a realization of one's sinfulness, a desire to be Christian, moments of relapsing into sinfulness, and an eventual surrender to God (Wyss, *Writing* 14). As Deborah Gussman notes, "While conventional Puritan narratives focus on the need for the sinner to turn inward in the search for God and salvation, Apess's collection of narratives stresses the responsibility of the community, of fellow Christians, in ensuring and promoting each other's salvation" ("The Politics" 111). The women in *Experiences* are drawing on a new trend in nineteenth-century conversion narratives, in which "we can locate a liberatory or utopian

¹² See Jace Weaver's *Unforgotten Gods*, chapter 1; Weaver's *That the People Might Live*, chapter 2; Wyss's "Captivity and Conversion"; Mielke; Haynes; Tiro; and the chapter on *Son* in Fulford as texts that specifically treat *Son*. See Doolen's chapter on Apess regarding "Looking Glass." Numerous other works mention "Looking Glass" in conjunction with *Son*, as both have overlapping messages and rhetoric. Examples of texts that discuss *Eulogy* include Gussman's "'O Savage'"; Velikova; Tiro; Konkle's "Indian Literacy"; and Dannenberg. Perhaps the best example of an article on Apess's masculinity is Bayers, and O'Connell's introduction to *On Our Own Ground* also touches on masculinity. An interesting discussion of race can be found in Matthew Dennis; Warrior has a chapter on Apess's life and religion; Vogel also has a chapter on Apess regarding race and oratory.

¹³ See especially Bayers and the last third of Gussman's "The Politics of Piety."

¹⁴ Mary Apess was a Methodist whereas the other women refused to align with a particular denomination—"though Caleb and George were both members of the Free-Will Baptist church" (Gussman, "The Politics" 107).

impulse which posited that individual spiritual conversion could bring about conversions or changes in the world” (Gussman, “The Politics” 104). Apess’s women not only evince how they appeal to natives in their own communities to embrace God, but their stories also come together as a communal voice—five stories (including William Apess’s) converging, all from diverse people sending the same message. More than striving to convert all natives, though, all of these narratives “imply the need for whites to act more Christian towards them” (Gussman, “The Politics” 114). This suggests that these Pequot converts want not only a community of natives but a community of all Christians who act as *true* followers of Christ’s teachings.

Though each woman is different, their narratives take on “the conventional conversion form,” grounded in Scripture and experiential knowledge that linked the sublime with everyday life (Gussman, “The Politics” 106). Mary Apess’s and Caleb’s narratives include several citations from the Bible—which is probably because they were literate whereas George and Wampy were uneducated (107). Unlike Puritan narratives, “Sally George and Anne Wampy recount their terrors in a more literal way” (109). Each narrative “contains images from the natural world, specifically the ‘wilderness’ or forest” (109), which I will discuss in greater detail shortly. Yet, as Gussman notes, some of the images of wilderness may also be metaphorical—such as Mary Apess’s shelter among the rocks recalling God as the “Rock of . . . salvation” from Deuteronomy and Psalms, as well as the “refuge and fortress” from Psalms. In addition, wandering in the wilderness recalls the image of the wandering Jew, “as well as the image of Christ’s temptations in the wilderness, and hence, the moral wilderness of the unregenerate soul” (110). In sum, all of the narratives take on some characteristics of Puritan conversion narratives, such as using Bible verses and

imagery to bring moments of conversion to life. However, these narratives also call on a greater sense of community and are more vivid than the conversion narratives of white Puritans—especially when discussing the struggle between following God versus Satan.

Overall, through these conversion narratives, Apess shows that female natives can be effective orators, just like their male counterparts—such as Apess, himself, Christian convert and preacher Samson Occom, and even the male natives of *The Last of the Mohicans*. Apess's stories of women's orations reflect the interest in converting natives to Christianity, the possibility of natives successfully being converted, and the appeal of native speakers to white audiences. The women in Apess's text acquire agency through first converting to Christianity and then using their voices in public spheres to tell their stories, convert new followers, and argue against traditional white Christian closed-mindedness—while still maintaining their Pequot identities.

Apess's Writings

Many of Apess's texts (namely *Experiences*, *A Son of the Forest*, and *Eulogy on King Philip*) include personal narratives as well as biographical narratives about various native Americans that Apess knows. Apess's five narratives in *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians* are conversion narratives—stories that typically follow the a pattern of realizing God's goodness, facing temptation and relapses into sin, and finally giving oneself to God.¹⁵ Apess uses personal narratives—a widely practiced narrative form—to discuss larger issues of racism and religion that go beyond the individual subjects of his texts. Mielke states,

¹⁵ See Gussman's "The Politics of Piety."

“[Various scholars]¹⁶ note that Apess’s narrative of religious conversion entails a critique of racism in the church and greater society” (4).

In order to write these critiques, Apess had to establish himself as an authority on issues of race and Christianity. As a native, it was difficult to be seen as an authority on Christianity, and as a Christian it was difficult to be seen as an authentic Native American. Mielke notes, “While Euro-Americans pointed to Native American illiteracy as proof of cultural inferiority, the literate Indian was dismissed as a paradox or even as non-Native” (3). It was difficult for someone like Apess to maintain his identity as a “real” Native American since he could read, write, and speak well. Mielke and numerous other scholars describe Apess’s struggle to be seen as authentic while not playing into demeaning stereotypes.¹⁷ Apess also struggled to become a licensed preacher until he joined the Methodist Protestant church and was ordained in 1829. Though he preached to white and native audiences, he recalls whites mocking his sermons, in large part because they expected an “authentic” native and got Apess instead—a fairly well-spoken native in European dress.¹⁸ Yet, though he had

¹⁶ See especially footnotes 10-11 for examples of scholars who discuss Apess’s critiques of white Christians.

¹⁷ Numerous authors discuss the struggle of being both Christian and native. Early on, “Missionaries were constantly frustrated by the reluctance of most Indians to be converted, the very idea of a native Christian identity being culturally problematic. Indians recognized no line of distinction between religious and cultural life; once an Indian became a Christian, he was seen as having rejected more than the religious component of his former life. He called into question the cultural values by which he had been nurtured, resulting, in the minds of many, in deracination. Because, at the same time, the convert was seldom fully accepted into white society, conversion could result in isolation from both the white and Native American worlds” (LeBeau 20). The acts of reading and writing could position natives as being more Christian-like; by writing and using Bibles, they are participating in white culture, but marking Bible passages and signing their names in the margins “departs from the Anglo-American norm, suggesting a different relationship to the sacred, and perhaps even a particularly Native sense of spirituality. . . . The marginalia of the Eliot Bibles suggests some of the ways Native Christians used writing to create and maintain a community that is a product of colonialism but is at the same time rooted in traditional Native identity” (Wyss, *Writing* 1). The act of writing their conversion narratives placed them “in a newly forming colonial structure” that was simultaneously native and colonial subject (5). Natives knew that Euro-Americans were trying to define who natives were, so natives used writing in order to hold on to their belief that they could define their own culture better than Euro-Americans could (Konkle 39). Apess struggled to hold on to both cultures—being well-versed in Christian doctrine, as well as native beliefs and traditions.

¹⁸ See Mielke, especially page 6. Other scholars who note these difficulties include Wyss, who states, “As both a preacher and an exhorter, Apess travels from place to place, drawing crowds of disenfranchised people like

to struggle in order to preach, he succeeded in becoming a preacher when the conditions were right.

Apess probably benefited from the time period in which he was converted. Karim M. Tiro states, “Apess’s life (1798-1839) also coincides roughly with the years of the great spiritual revival that transformed the American religious landscape” (654). Religious awakenings were prevalent, and through the Methodist church Apess was able “to articulate to a broad audience a critique of the dominant culture and a vindication of the indigenous one” through his speeches and writings that appealed to youths like himself, who were in the lower classes of society (654). Being from the margins of American society, “Apess was able to shed light on the role that Puritanism had in legitimating white domination over the continent” (654). The time period, Apess’s status as a native, and his talents provided Apess with venues in which to speak and be heard.

As noted, the Methodist church was unique in that it allowed the licensing of native preachers. Tiro notes that natives would have been drawn to Methodism because of the denomination’s specific practices, as well, because “by acknowledging the individual’s direct relationship with the supernatural through visions and other forms of sensible revelation, praying outdoors, and emphasizing oral communication and the personal charisma of the preacher, enthusiastic evangelicals achieved a closer approximation of Native American traditions, however superficially, than their more liturgical peers” (669-70). Methodism in the early nineteenth century provided ways in which natives could retain familiar practices

himself, much in the tradition of the typical Methodist circuit rider. In fact, Apess’s narrative is defined by migration and movement as he travels throughout Connecticut, New York, Maine, Rhode Island and Massachusetts, preaching to both Whites and ‘colored people,’ as he calls his largely Native American and African American audiences” (*Writing* 165).

while experiencing new ways of worshipping, taking on new leadership roles within the congregation.

When discussing the roles that natives such as Apess played in Methodism, scholars often note that they had more opportunities than other Christians to preach in various ways. For example, Tiro says that “the organizational structure of the Methodist church offered responsibility—and, by implication, authority—as class leaders, exhorters, and preachers, to individuals who were denied any active role in conservative churches by virtue of their lack of education and social standing, if not their race.” As a class leader, Apess “reinforced his personal ‘author-ization’ to speak and write publicly to a white audience” (662). This notion of ethos or authority within the congregation is intriguing, and it does not stop with Apess or other male natives who took active roles in Christianity.

For the Methodists, people “blessed with the gift of eloquence were divinely authorized to speak and have their opinions considered seriously, regardless of rank or education” (Tiro 663). I would add “regardless of gender,” as well, which Apess demonstrates and Tiro confirms.¹⁹ Apess claimed authority through his style and use of the Bible, even though he lacked much education. He would cite and quote Biblical passages, reference well-known writers such as Mary Rowlandson, and abide by Euro-American conventions in his sermons, conversion narratives, and eulogies (664). Speaking in public also gave Apess authority to publish texts, and the Methodists “effectively outpublished their orthodox opponents. The five volumes of Apess’s writings and orations published between 1829 and 1836 were very much a part of this flood of popular literature” (664-5).

¹⁹ Tiro specifically discusses camp meetings, “where normal hierarchies of class, race, and gender were suspended” (663).

Apess has a mastery over oratory whether he is speaking or writing, but Bellin notes, “How much Apess knew of oral culture is uncertain” (91). The Christianity that Apess is familiar with is composed of both written and oral forms of rhetoric—not oral as strictly native, though written forms were classified as white/Christian.²⁰ As Pequot community leaders obtained power through their persuasiveness, Apess may have been quite familiar with the power of Pequot and white oratory and, hence, was able to blend the two in order to use Christian rhetoric to advance his own ideas on race relations. Apess’s women are able to do the same thing in *Experiences*, as readers see how they were able to preach in their communities, spreading Christian messages in ways that would, it seems, convince other natives to convert.

The Experiences of Four Christian, Native Women—Blending Genders

Apess writes about the experiences of four native women who had their own conversion experiences and became active members and preachers inside and outside of their churches. As mentioned earlier, the women in Apess’s *Experiences* cite the Bible and hymns numerous times, abide by the conventions of conversion narratives, and evince their authority as Christians. Deborah Gussman discusses why texts such as *Experiences* have received so little attention, noting “conversion narratives had been dismissed as *inauthentic* examples of American Indian ideologies, experiences, and voices. This is due, in part, to the fact that many of these narratives were ‘mediated’ or ‘as told to’ narratives” (“The Politics” 102,

²⁰ Bellin discusses how oral and textual forms coexist in Apess’s work: “Each convert tells his or her sorrows and speaks his or her salvation, while the author gathers these testaments to build a sacred society that exists in the text through the medium of speech, just as native voices survive in Christianity though read out by Christian texts. And just as Apess performs this act for his text, a similar act is performed in his text. . . . Unlike those who oppose text to voice, white to Indian, Sally George mates talk with books to heal people of all races harmed by scriptures of oppression. An Indian minister preaching an oral bible, she illustrates how, as in Apess’s texts, different traditions may infuse one another to the greater strength of all” (95).

emphasis original). Of course, Apess is recording the tales of the women, with the exception of his wife, Mary, who wrote her own narrative. Whether the other three women “wrote” their stories for Apess to record permanently or whether he added the Bible verses, hymn references, and conventional language, the message is the same—these women had authority to preach to other Christians, and their narratives (which are written in the first-person, so readers may even forget that Apess “penned” the narratives) reinforce their authority through the use of such references and conventions.

Apess seems to be blurring gender roles as he tells the stories of three native women. He indicates that he is *not* the authoritative male editor in that he distances his voice from the voices of these women and shows great respect towards their spirituality and actions. Pequot men and women were not divided into hierarchies—which I will explain in more detail later—which might help explain why Apess can blur genders. Scholars also often note that whites feminized natives, so white readers might lump Apess with female natives, anyway.²¹ Peter L. Bayers states that, “while it is possible to historically reconstruct traditional Pequot sex roles, it is difficult to reconstruct Pequot *gender* roles. Indeed, the category of ‘gender’ is itself problematic, given that it may very well have had no parallel in pre-contact or early post-contact Pequot or Algonquian cultures” (124, emphasis original). Bayers goes on to suggest that Apess would have resisted any blurring between the genders because of “his awareness of the danger of androgynous manhood and its blurring of masculine and feminine gender boundaries. While many white males of the era were anxiety-ridden about this danger, the threat of androgyny was particularly acute for Apess given his identity as a

²¹ “From the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, southern New England tribal cultures were radically altered, which meant the transformation of the traditional roles of Native men and women as they coped with the enormous pressures imposed upon their cultures. . . . society feminized Native peoples in order to rationalize their subjugation” (Bayers 123).

Native during the Jacksonian era” (126). Then why does he write from the perspective of three native women? If he does not wish to be feminized, as Bayers suggests, then he has an odd way of showing it.

By recording these narratives, Apess seems to join the tradition of male editors who recorded Mary Jemison’s and Black Hawk’s narratives. Readers know he is the editor, but he tries to distance himself from the women’s narratives, perhaps to convince his readers that he is not altering the stories he is telling. He accomplishes this best when he injects his own voice after telling the women’s narratives; he distinguishes their voices from his own while, at the same time, indicating that he is part of a community with these women.²² Hilary Wyss notes the following:

In *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians of the Pequot Tribe* Apess is poised between his role as a convert and his position as a missionary. As missionary, he writes brief biographical accounts of his converts just as the Anglo-American missionaries John Eliot, Experience Mayhew, John Sergeant, and Samuel Kirkland did before him. But in an important shift he includes himself as a convert along with four other Indians. In doing so he emphasizes the interrelations of the roles of missionary and convert. Just as Joseph Johnson, Samsom Occom, and to a certain extent Hendrick Aupaumut did, he approaches those he refers to as his “brethren”

²² The notion of community was very important in Pequot culture, among Christians and non-Christians. On the role of community for Christian Pequots, Salisbury notes, “What is striking in accounts of praying Indian church services is not the theological proficiency of the converts but the enthusiastic participation of all—young and old, male and female—in catechizing, psalm-singing, praying, and other activities in which the members acted together or responded in predictable fashion. When the pattern was broken and the individual was alone, in the conversion experience, he or she broke down” (51). Thus Christian Pequots needed a sense of community for conversions to be sustainable. Wyss also notes, “Literacy was for many Natives the means through which they acknowledged their participation in the larger colonial world. By writing their own narratives of conversion, Natives were defining their place in a newly forming colonial structure, positioning themselves simultaneously as Native Americans and as colonial subjects” (5). The act of Apess recording and publishing multiple conversion narratives not only brings natives together; it also brings them into a larger colonial community.

(other Native Americans) as precisely that—individuals of coequal status to whom he must present Christianity as a community resource, not a means of eradicating culture. (156)

While Apess is the educated male recording the stories of women, he does not seem to be patronizing these women. Indeed, he goes to great lengths in order to prove to his audience that these women were respected in their tribes despite their lack of much formal education. Perhaps they are even more respectable because they successfully converted to Christianity without great amounts of education, status, or wealth—they found Christ through their own tribulations, being guided by Christ rather than by whites. Apess appears to view these women as fellow native Christians, not part of a male versus female dichotomy or hierarchy.

Even Bayers admits that Apess's writing style is not solely male-oriented, as he says, "the style of Apess's conversion is more akin to female conversion experiences" (131). Carolyn Haynes also notes that Apess's conversion adheres more to the structure of the female conversion narrative (29). Haynes states, "Although Apess does note that his drinking problem abated after his baptismal rededication to the church, he—in a similar fashion to women converts—devotes more time appealing to his audience's emotions and underscoring his own by delineating the hardship, injustice, and wretchedness he and his tribal people have suffered" (30). Scholars often note that Apess's writings seek to blur the line between Pequot and white identities, as well as white and Christian identities.²³ In *Experiences* he also seems to be blurring the line between genders, suggesting a oneness

²³ See, for example, Haynes: "Apes repeatedly and in a variety of contexts juxtaposes familiar customs and norms with unfamiliar ones, thereby relativizing, interrogating, and overturning taken-for-granted assumptions about Protestant and Pequot identity" (26).

between all converts to Christianity—a oneness that Methodists promoted in the early nineteenth century, as stated earlier.

Apess taps into this sense of oneness through the rhetoric he uses in his writings. On Apess's rhetoric, Haynes states the following:

Methodism helped him not only to define his own dialectic sense of self by enabling a continuously shifting scheme of identification but also to adopt a new, more accepted form of rhetoric that could work to counter the powerful anti-Indian, expansionist rhetoric and the growing conception of the U.S. as a homogeneous Anglo-Saxon nation-state. Through a complex layering of juxtapositions and comparisons, Apess questions and affirms new gradations of Methodist-Pequot identity and envisions a new American continent. (Haynes 27)

Apess could use Protestant rhetoric in order to critique Christianity and race roles, and in *Experiences* he implicitly critiques gender roles, as well. Since “Protestants, even those of lower rank, were allowed and even expected on occasion to express themselves through the telling of their personal conversion story. . . . the conversion narrative offered Apess a straightforward and accepted mode of communication” (Haynes 27).

Haynes further states that Apess's use of conversion *and* feminine rhetoric in his own conversion narrative allowed him a different kind of agency. She says, “Thus, while the well-known conversion narrative afforded Apess greater credibility and a larger audience, the less familiar emotion-filled Methodist and feminine-style testimonial enabled him to codify and give voice to his outrage at religious hypocrisy and racist discrimination, an outrage which is as justified after as before his conversion” (31). Emotional passages fill Apess's narratives, which scholars particularly note in Apess's major conversion narrative, *A Son of*

the Forest. Laura L. Mielke notes that Apess is aiming to extract tears from his audience and push them to enraged social action (5).²⁴ Perhaps Apess, in *Experiences*, takes on female personae, writing the conversion narratives of actual women, in order to—again—voice his outrage in the style that is more suitable for emotional women. In other words, this feminine style might better serve Apess’s content—that of an outraged and subjugated Christian convert who is not seen as masculine as a white man.

Apess may have also used the voices and stories of women in order to call on more women to become spiritually involved. Haynes notes that both race and gender impacted Apess’s rhetoric, as she notes the following:

Apess’s call for “ladies of honor and virtue” to participate in taking antiracist action and to forge a new divine republic certainly speaks to his awareness of women’s palpable presence within both the Methodist church and the union as a whole.

Perhaps more than any other Protestant denomination, Methodism offered women opportunities for leadership roles as deaconesses, lay preachers, missionaries, prayer leaders, and Sunday School teachers. Apess’s social vision unites an antipathy for all varieties of prejudice and scorn with the realization of a landscape replete with white, native, and other nonwhite women and men; and it is a vision propelled rather than repulsed by a profound Methodist spirituality. (40)

²⁴ Haynes also discusses Apess’s emotional appeals: “Yet, rather than abandon the Pequot struggle, surrender his Pequot identity or refuse contact with whites, Apess—in a somewhat similar way to the Methodists—chose to employ ridicule as an opportunity for change, moral suasion, and empowerment. Apess achieved this empowerment by making a variety of cross-cultural or bifocal links in an effort to capture his white audience’s empathy, to prick their sense of Christian guilt and duty, and to spur them hopefully to political action” (37). And again: “Thus, rather than signifying a surrender to the dominant system of thought or a mere instrumental use of it, Apess’s interaction with Methodism provides a glimpse into the way intercultural knowledge can offer reservoirs for renewing antiracist values and for promulgating effective and humane social changes” (40).

In sum, Apess employed women's voices and tales so he could tap into a more feminized, emotional rhetoric and appeal to a female audience that might be better persuaded to convert to Christianity if they felt women were sharing their testimonials.

Apess's Women as Preachers and Singers

Apess and the four women in *Experiences* all appropriate Christian rhetoric, even though most scholars focus solely on Apess's rhetoric. Robert Allen Warrior notes that, like Apess, the women do not "testify that they are abandoning being Pequot in order to convert. Instead, they seem to lay claim to Christianity over and against white Christians" (29). They claim agency and authority within the religion, even though they would typically be viewed as powerless converts. The messages of Christianity and their adherence to those messages make them better and more authoritative Christians than the whites who transgress against God's will. Warrior articulates this well: "Clearly, [Hannah] Caleb's conversion was not a capitulation to white culture. It seems, rather, a challenge to white Christians, a statement that the degraded Native can better live out the demands of the gospel than the descendants of those who brought that gospel to New England" (29).

Apess and his fellow converts knew that white Christians were using the Bible to reinforce their racist beliefs and rhetoric. The most powerful way to combat this racism is to use the same text but twist white readings into their opposites, showing that the whites are actually working against the messages of the Bible. As Jace Weaver states, "Apess's subversion through rhetoric can be seen clearly. He invokes the language of evangelical Christianity with its appeal to the Bible. In all his writings, he constantly throws up the norms, language, and tools of Christianity into the face of Amer-Europeans in order to

expose their racism and to subvert their use of the same material for racist ends” (16). In *Experiences*, Apess does this with his own conversion narrative and his appendix, “An Indian’s Looking Glass for the White Man.” Yet the female converts use the same rhetorical tools, evoking the Bible in order to reject racist biblical readings.

The four women in *Experiences* constantly mention specific Bible verses and quote hymns as they narrate their conversions to Christianity. Since Apess’s own conversion narrative is rife with such references, the rhetoric included in the women’s narratives seems natural. Apess’s wife wrote her narrative, which appears after Apess’s with the subtitle “Written By Herself”—punctuating the fact that she did not have her husband write her story, though readers may assume he edited it. As Mary Apess’s story unfolds, readers see that she takes us through her conversion narrative, which includes references to singing and reading the Bible.

Like her husband, Mary Apess first describes her upbringing leading to her conversion. She was placed in the care of guardians who “blasphemed their blessed Maker” (133). She had no one to teach her God’s ways, but “it was suddenly suggested to [her] mind that God saw [her], and [she] was afraid to die” (133). Without pressure from outside forces, Mary Apess senses God’s presence. Later, she follows the example of a subsequent guardian, Mr. Ely, who is a Presbyterian. Mary Apess feared “ministers and professors of religion” because they seemed better than other people, but she wanted salvation for her soul. In this state of mind, with a preacher’s words echoing in her mind, Mary Apess “went out” and prayed for the first time and continued to attend church meetings (134).

While trying to be Christian in solitude, Mary Apess was tempted to be un-Christian by her wicked stepmother, who called her “evil.” At this time, Mary Apess continued to pray

alone and started to read her Bible (135). Typical of so many conversion narratives, she reads the Bible in order to console herself when sin tempts her.²⁵ She also seems to read the Bible as a means of converting herself, since she feels that no one around her can help; her guardians have wicked ways, and the Methodists in town are said to be evil. Whereas she used to be led astray by “music and dancing,” “reading those sacred pages . . . condemned my former proceedings, and my heart was not willing to submit to them” (135-6). Being led astray by “music and dancing” sounds like a dilemma white women converts faced, which is interesting in light of the native traditions of singing and dancing. Secular songs became taboo for Christians, and natives were pressured to abandon many traditional practices. Native practices of singing and dancing, in general, would have added to Mary Apess’s conflict, as she would be pushed to give up traditional practices and take on the accepted practice of singing Christian songs. Not much is known about Pequot culture, especially specific religious practices that might have included singing and dancing. Yet we can generalize about northeastern native singing and dancing practices, which are illuminated in texts about northeastern tribes.²⁶ If we assume that Mary Apess sang as part of her native culture, then she would feel pressured to give up singing native songs, besides giving up other practices that might have conflicted with Christian values—resulting in her feeling as though she is being pulled in two directions.

Mary Apess oscillates between despair and faith, finally getting involved in the Methodist church (136) and working through the “sickness and disappointments” that God sent to her because He was angry (137). Upon reading a hymn, Mary Apess views Jesus (137), realizes her guilt, and keeps attending classes until she eventually completely converts.

²⁵ I will return to this topic in great detail when I discuss *The Wide, Wide World* in the next chapter.

²⁶ Some helpful texts include Love’s *Samson Occom* and Strong’s “*We Are Still Here!*”

From the time she sees a vision of Jesus, Mary Apess reads the Bible and hymns more and more, and each act of reading and singing becomes its own conversion experience, furthering her along the path towards her eventual salvation.

From time to time, Mary Apess mentions specific Bible verses or hymns that have particular meaning to her. For instance, she quotes Matthew 18:3, ““Except ye be converted and become as a little child, ye can in no wise enter the kingdom of heaven”” (135). This verse is appropriate, as natives were already viewed as children of the forest; perhaps natives like Mary Apess are better disposed to becoming Christians if they are already in the requisite child-like state. Ironically, the notion that Christians are child-like also collapses some of the differences between natives and whites; it is not natives who are child-like but *all* true Christians. Mary Apess also mentions that many Bible verses did not convince her, but Matthew 18:3 “so forcibly struck [her] heart that [she] could not doubt its correctness” (135). Again, reading this particular Bible verse pushes Mary Apess forward in her conversion.

Mary Apess also refers to Acts 24:25: ““And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance,’ etc.” as she recalls part of a Methodist preacher’s sermon that affected her after she finally began to attend their meetings. Hearing these words about Christ again solidified Mary Apess’s conversion. The term “temperance” from this passage is particularly meaningful for women, who had to practice temperance in every aspect of their own lives and also fought for their husbands to be more temperate in their consumption of alcohol.²⁷

²⁷ Alcohol is, of course, a popular topic for William Apess and other native writers because of the introduction of rum into native society. In *Indian Nullification*, William Apess praises the Temperance Society of native missionaries (Apess 234). Also see Wyss’s discussion of the struggle over alcohol that missionaries and natives had (*Writing* 97-105). Mancall provides an extensive study, as well.

Later, when Mary Apess sees her vision²⁸ of Jesus, she remarks the time when Jesus said, ““Son, daughter, go in peace and sin no more; for thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee”” (137). This is still early in Mary Apess’s conversion, but the guilt she feels upon seeing Christ gives her renewed strength to become a good Christian. Still later, she refers to John 19:30: ““When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, It is finished; and he bowed his head and gave up the ghost”” (139). This verse could provide comfort by reminding readers that Jesus is waiting for them in death. Mary Apess says these words seemed to be spoken from Christ directly into her heart, as if Jesus said, ““All this I suffered for you, that you might live with me in heaven”” (139). These words bring about a less explicit vision of God’s love, in which Jesus is ““revealed”” to her in all of His forms (139).

All of the Bible verses that Mary Apess mentions bolster her strength in times of need, show her authority as a reader, and evince how well she knows the Bible—even as the verses challenge her to change her traditional practices and adopt new ones. Her knowledge of the Bible proves that she is educated—not “savage”—and can prove herself to be a better Christian than whites because she practices Christian doctrine by closely studying her Bible. Furthermore, each time she turns to the Bible readers see that her conversion is pushed along; every time she oscillates back towards sinfulness and grief, the Bible reminds her of the path she must take.

The story of Hannah Caleb, which follows Mary Apess’s, also mentions Bible verses in just about four pages of text. During a moment in which she begins to feel doubtful, she quotes from Job: ““Thou hast shaken me to pieces; all my bones are out of joint”” (146). This

²⁸ Seeing visions of Christ was a common trope in conversion narratives (see Gussman, “The Politics”). Seeing visions is also one of the four characteristics that LeBeau assigns to native cultures: “a similar world-view, a shared notion of cosmic harmony, emphasis on directly experiencing powers and visions, and a common view of the cycle of life and death” (9). This reference to visions blends the conventional reference to visions in conversion narratives with general native religious practices of seeking visions in nature.

verse represents how Caleb feels inside—shaken and confused or out of place. She notes that she was “weak, eating but just enough to keep soul and body united, often sleeping on the cold ground, and frequently not closing my eyes for nights together” (146). The verse from Job represents how akin her feelings are to his. Then she quotes from John: “He that is born of God, has the witness in himself” (147). This verse indicates that Caleb has started to turn towards God as part of her conversion process. Caleb immediately closes her narrative at this point, noting that that she “went on from day to day, in the service of [her] God, praising him all the while, and no cloud to darken [her] day” (147). She arrives at a place where she feels one with John and his words—indicating the final turning point in her conversion.

William Apess then interjects towards the end of Caleb’s story to praise her piety and mention how she performed such services as “teaching the young children of her tribe to read, while at other times she would instruct them and others, by precept and example, in the way to heaven and happiness” (148). Caleb was a reader, teacher, and preacher—and example to all Christians; her roles evince her authority and leave readers with little or no reason to question that authority. Like Caleb, William Apess also mentions the Bible to bolster his authority, among other reasons. As Haynes says, “In addition to poetic effusion, Apess frequently invokes the Bible to authorize and enrich his tale. He gains assurance, for instance, that his calling to the ministry is genuine when he receives a nighttime vision²⁹ of an angel who ‘reads some extracts of John’s Gospel’” (29). Having facility with the Bible proves to readers that the authors are true Christians, and this facility also reinforces Christian beliefs in the converts because they provide so much comfort and clarity.

Mary Apess also mentions hymns in her narrative, quoting four verses from “‘Come humble sinners, in whose breast’” (136). She turns to this hymn because she is feeling as

²⁹ See previous note.

though God is angry at her, and she is tired after a long day of caring for a sick woman. This hymn brings about the vision of Jesus I mentioned before, turning her from her despair to a renewed sense of hope. Apess later mentions “singing one of Dr. Watts’s psalms—to hope, to love, to pray, is all that I require” (138). Singing this psalm is part of the battle within Apess between God and Satan, as she notes that she fought with the “enemy of [her] soul” about being “good enough” (138). Later, another verse from a hymn springs to her mind: “I can but perish if I go; I am resolved to try—for if I stay away, I know I shall forever die” (139). This verse comes to her when she is in a state much like the one that Caleb also describes—sleepless and without an appetite. Though Apess still suffers, she resolves to fight through and “perish” at the feet of Jesus (139). Later that night, thinking of Jesus, Mary Apess feels physically struck by “lines of the poet [from a Puritan hymn]: Come mourning souls, dry up your tears, / And banish all your guilty fears” (140). The ways in which hymns strike Apess suggest that God has taken an active role in her conversion; each thought about scripture is an integral part in her conversion. After a church meeting, Mary Apess sings “a hymn called the Good Shepherd: Come, good Lord, with courage arm us; / Persecution rages here . . .” (140). These verses “spoke the sentiments of [her] heart,” and she decided to confess her feelings to her mother with the help of God’s strength; she attends a prayer meeting with her “brethren” and strives “to tell them what the Lord had done for [her] soul” (141). At this point, readers see Apess using her voice to exhort to others because her own conversion is coming full circle.

Just like reading Bible verses, hearing and singing hymns strengthens Mary Apess. As she states, “The hearing of the old pilgrims’ songs, and their sweet admonitions, attended to buoy me up and keep me from stumbling into the ditch of despair; for it stimulated me to

move forward” (141). Hymns serve the same purpose for the characters in *The Last of the Mohicans* and, as we will see in the next chapter, for Ellen Montgomery in *The Wide, Wide World*. In addition, though, hymns for natives such as Mary Apess could provide a sense of normalcy or continuity—the act of singing that would have been common to their native practices.

Singing and songs are scarcely referenced in writings on Pequot culture. Scholars often refer to Pequot tales or fables that have been passed down orally, but singing is emphasized far less. Neil Salisbury mentions Pequot converts engaging in hymn-singing (“Red” 51), but it is unclear how much they would have sung before being converted. However, in light of native cultures, in general, one may assume that Pequots had a fairly rich tradition of singing during ritual ceremonies, in particular. Mary Apess mentions songs, poems, Bible verses, and singing several more times over the course of her narrative in order to evince her conversion, show the common trend of oscillating between acceptance and rejection of God, and ultimately lend authority to herself as a Christian Indian.

Hannah Caleb discusses singing in her narrative, as well. She goes through a spiritual crisis during her conversion from resisting to accepting Christianity. Going into the wilderness in despair because of her wickedness, she states the following:

I then turned from the world and the prayers of the saints and went into the wilderness and sat myself down, and I had an impression that I must sing. I thought, how could I sing of redeeming grace and dying love? Oh, the answer was, “Sing, for his mercy

endureth forever.” I must praise God for that; but where to begin I knew not,³⁰ but thought I would try. So I began this way: “Glory to God the Father, glory to God the Son, glory to God the Holy Ghost, glory to God alone.” (147)

Through prayer and song, Caleb completed her conversion experience. Though she did not know where to start at first, Caleb finds her voice and uses it as a tool in her conversion—a way for her to turn the corner, just as Mary Apess does. For Caleb and others, songs provide an emotional outlet and illuminate the path to salvation. Praying and singing aloud provide Caleb with a means of speaking to God; in other words, she can use her voice and feel as though she is speaking directly to God.

Overall, the female converts in *Experiences* mention hymns and singing time and again, which is not extraordinary for Christian natives. Though scholars do not seem to mention traditional Pequot singing, hymns written and sung by women had a great effect on Native American converts, in general, where the matriarchal tradition was stronger (Norton 56). The matriarchal tradition was quite strong in Pequot culture. William A. Starna notes that, while patrilineality was more common than matrilineality, leadership positions could be passed on from fathers to daughters; Pequot society was fairly non-stratified, so male and female members were ranked equally though they had different roles in the community (39-41). The highest position for Pequots was that of sachems, or sagamores—community leaders. They were commonly men, but “female sachems were not unknown” (41). Councils of men and women also advised the sachem, who was influential because of his/her “persuasive abilities” (41-42). This suggests a mastery of oral argumentation on the part of the sachems, whether male or female.

³⁰ Perhaps this alludes to the notion that many Christian concepts did not correspond to native practices.

In addition, editors note that, in 1674, “there were three hundred male Pequots.” Then, “[d]uring the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries, the Pequots, through their tribal council, frequently challenged the authority or honesty of their ‘overseers’ and asked for their dismissal. Pequot political leadership survived among core families and respected elders, who often were women” (Salisbury 67). According to Neal Salisbury, “Leadership in praying Indian communities generally remained in the same lineages as earlier” (67), so it was not uncommon for female converts like the women in *Experiences* to be religious leaders. The combination of a greater amount of agency for women in Pequot culture, in general, and the sparse number of Pequot males remaining after the Pequot War meant that women could be leaders in Pequot society, both politically and spiritually. These factors also may provide more reasons for why *Experiences* includes the narratives of four women—their voices were not silenced in Pequot culture, and more women than men remained after the Pequot War.

As spiritual leaders, Pequot women would have been preaching, singing, and possibly writing hymns. By the 1770s, British, American, and native Christians were writing hymns. Religious expression through singing was finally acceptable across denominations, though singing non-biblical songs was not. Joanna Brooks says the following:

Whether committed to memory, hand-copied in personal tune books, or gathered in printed collections, hymns traveled across cultures, colonies, and continents; they crossed boundaries of denomination, race, class, and gender. Importantly, the orality of this textual form invited participation, innovation, and contribution even by semiliterate, nonliterate, or non-English-speaking worshippers. Thus, we find that

hymns were an especially important part of the cultures of revival that attracted and enfranchised poor whites and people of color. (54)

As mentioned in my previous chapter, natives could adapt hymns to their own ends and incorporate their own modes of performance, which intrigued whites. Perhaps Apess and his fellow converts enjoyed singing in Pequot culture and felt comfortable using their singing voices in praise of God. In addition, hymns can be appropriated into any circumstance or time of need. They allow Christians to tap into their emotions in order to speak to God, whatever those emotions might be. Furthermore, joining their voices together would have contributed to a sense of community, which was important in Pequot culture.

Besides singing hymns, natives were also allowed to preach in the Methodist denomination. The Methodist denomination was more accepting of non-whites, though (as noted earlier) ordination did not come easily for non-whites. In *Experiences*, when Sally George converts, she states, “I now returned home to my friends, and began to exhort my young mates to repentance, and to tell all that came in my way what the Lord had done for my soul” (149). When George’s story ends, Apess notes himself that George “was counted almost a preacher; her language was free, lively, and animating. . . . And while visiting the sick she would often pour into their ear the balm of consolation and refer them to the blessed Jesus . . . Where she met with the sin-sick soul, she would pour into their ears the oil of joy and point them to Jesus” (150). While ordination would have been difficult for George just as it was for Apess, George seems to have great mobility within her own community; she mentions preaching to her “friends,” not to white audiences that might be hostile—as they were towards Apess.³¹

³¹ Sally George might have had some success amongst Pequots, too, because of her experiences with Apess. As his beloved aunt, she helped Apess gather and convert listeners. Kim McQuaid notes that his aunt, Sally

Apess's final tale is of Anne Wampy's conversion. Apess says that, after her conversion, she "was free to tell the exercises of her mind" (151). He then lets Wampy tell her own story in broken English, describing how she exhorted sinners, telling them to love Jesus (152). Hannah Caleb also briefly discusses preaching after she describes her completed conversion. She notes, "I began to publish to them what the Lord had done for my soul, and warning sinners wherever I went to flee from the wrath to come" (147). Indeed, she "published" the story orally to her friends and also in written form through Apess. All of the women's texts read like sermons and could be read aloud as sermons. Apess and his fellow converts preach to readers through these texts, probably causing readers to connect with at least one of the five tales about suffering and doubts being soothed and eradicated through Christianity. The women in *Experiences* especially seem to preach to their fellow natives, drawing them into a Christian community that they were trying to consolidate with their native community. At a time when Pequots were "going extinct," as many people believed, the need for community was probably stronger than ever during the nineteenth century.

Concluding Remarks

Scholars are commenting on Apess's writings more, though they largely do not discuss the main body of *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians*, especially the fact that four of the five Christian Indians are women. Readers cannot help but note the imbalance between male and female narratives in *Experiences*, yet for some reason scholars do not discuss the significance of this—and it *is* significant. The women read, sing, and preach to

George, "assisted him in gathering together small congregations of Pequots to hear his words" in the early 1820s (612).

varying degrees, all evincing their agency as Christians with voices and the authority to share those voices with others.

Apess wants these stories to come from the women, themselves. Mary Apess wrote her own story, and then Apess recorded the stories of the other women in the first person and in their own words, adding his comments at the end of their personal stories. His additions do remind readers of his editorial presence, but they also distance him from their stories, as if saying “these women wrote their own narratives, and now I am just elaborating.” They are a diverse group of women with different pasts and levels of education, but they form a community of Christian natives who can connect with various readers on different levels, all offering testimonials that can entice converts to stay on the correct path and persuade non-Christians to join the ranks of, particularly, the Methodists, who accept members regardless of race, gender, or social class. In *Experiences*, race, gender, and class join as one community of voices that use powerful Christian rhetoric that aims to sway readers—and that rhetoric has the power to work on not only nineteenth-century readers but contemporary readers, as well.

Chapter 3:

The Wide, Wide World: Ellen Montgomery's Christian Agency

Recently, scholars have paid increasing attention to Susan Warner's works, as well as the works of other nineteenth-century American women authors.³² When discussing *The Wide, Wide World*, scholars largely focus on the novel's main character, Ellen Montgomery—a young girl who is sent to upstate New York to live with her aunt, Miss Fortune, while her father and sick mother vacation in Europe. Typically, Ellen is characterized as a weak, powerless girl who cries incessantly.³³ Ellen is powerless in that she has no real control over her situation, being a child who must live with her unpleasant aunt. Yet, through religion, she finds her voice and gains mobility in New York and, later, in Scotland.

Though the sentimentality of the novel may annoy some modern readers, it is an important work that should not be ignored. Sharon Kim acknowledges the book's importance as she states the following:

Cried over by Jo March and loved by Vincent Van Gogh, praised by critics, pirated by printers, and read by hundreds of thousands all over the United States and Europe, Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1850) was a best-seller of the "seepy-weepy" variety, classified in the twentieth century as sentimental, and thus not taken seriously

³² This is due in large part to the work of Baym, particularly in her book, *Woman's Fiction*. The influential first edition was published in 1978. I use the 1993 second edition for my study.

³³ See particularly Dobson: "*The Wide, Wide World* should be an unreadable book; it is full of tears, prayers, and hymn readings and its protagonist, Ellen Montgomery, is a character in many ways uncongenial to the modern reader—particularly in her narrow religiosity and her social elitism" (228). Baym notes that most of Ellen's tears occur in her early childhood, asking "where are the tears for which this novel has so often been lampooned?" ("Women's" 342).

as literary realism. When feminist critics recovered the novel from obscurity, they examined its place in cultural history and its influence on sentimental fiction. (783)³⁴

The novel's bestseller status, critique of the societal roles of women, and detailed discussions of Christianity make *The Wide, Wide World* an important text in any nineteenth-century study of American women and religion.

Ellen's story is a bildungsroman,³⁵ as she grows into a woman and a Christian. However, according to Jane Tompkins in the "Afterword" to *The Wide, Wide World*, "it is a kind of bildungsroman in reverse. Instead of initiating her into society, the heroine's experience teaches her how to withdraw into the citadel of herself. The Christian precepts she internalizes teach her not how to succeed in the marketplace, or implement her purposes in the world, but how to become a saint who makes herself malleable to the will of others" (598). Yet I argue that the story is a bildungsroman because, by becoming a good Christian, Ellen does learn to survive and assert her agency in the world. I agree with Nina Baym, who wrote the following:

Alice's religious teachings are actually quite pragmatic. . . . She advises Ellen to be solicitous of her neglected grandmother—not to do her Christian duty, but to develop

³⁴ Sharon Kim also discusses the book's popularity: "[Warner's] avoidance of church scenes followed her ethic of moving Christianity out of the church and into daily life, but it also enabled her to attract readers in other denominations, including Catholics like Paula Bodewig. For those drawn to sentimental heroines, she created a young girl whose emotions and hardships appealed to a large readership in at least eight countries and five languages. The appeal extended to male readers, like Vincent Van Gogh, who taught his pupils—boys—with *The Wide, Wide World* and gave copies of it to family and friends. Audiences with different motives for reading could thus find something to enjoy in *The Wide, Wide World*. All would be exposed to Warner's teachings, but Puritan realism would be understood most fully by the audience that, through a lifestyle of devout reading and belief, would be extremely sensitive to textual allusion" (805).

³⁵ A bildungsroman can be defined as a coming-of-age story. Ellen's bildungsroman is part of a larger tradition in Warner's time. Beverly R. Voloshin notes the following: "These novels, spanning the period of the female *Bildungsroman*, are Catharine Sedgwick's *A New-England Tale* (1822), the first exemplar of this genre; Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1850), the first spectacular best-seller of the mid-century; Maria Susan Cummins' *The Lamplighter* (1854), the popular novel which Hawthorne singled out for invective in his famous diatribe against the 'scribbling women'; and August Jane Evans' *Beulah* (1859) and her novel of 1867, *St. Elmo*, which marks the virtual end of the genre" (286). A handful of scholars have followed in the footsteps of Baym and analyzed some of these texts together, since they are similar in so many ways.

some affection in that loveless house. . . . Actually, Ellen's new behavior does not win the aunt over, but it disarms her; unable to aggress against the child, she leaves her alone, and Ellen finds the freedom that she would never have enjoyed if she had remained defiant. (*Woman's* 147)

The teachings that Ellen learns from Alice and other Christian characters help her become a stronger person, because the lessons of Christianity apply to the lessons of life.³⁶

Whereas Cooper's Alice Munro is already a devout Christian when readers encounter her and Apees's Christian Indians recall their conversions after the fact, Warner takes readers through Ellen's long journey of becoming a Christian—her doubt, resistance, fear, and ultimate acceptance. Ellen runs into Christian characters throughout the plot, and they bolster her; yet she proves to be largely independent and powerful when she finally bolsters herself. This process is aided by her readings of religious texts, reading and singing hymns, and absorbing the oral teachings and preachings of her various spiritual guides. Ultimately, being a Christian brings power. As Jane Tompkins states, "This fiction shares with the reform movement a belief that all true action is not material but spiritual, that one obtains spiritual power through prayer, and that those who know how, in the privacy of their closets, to struggle for possession of their souls will one day possess the world through the power given to them by God" (qtd. in Sharon Kim 784). So, while Ellen lacks power in many instances throughout the text, she does claim religious agency—especially by the novel's

³⁶ David Reynolds also notes how Christian teachings apply to the "real" world: "The religion of Warner's novel is determinedly nonintellectual and plain. God is a Divine Friend always ready to help, even in the most trifling crisis. Religious action, in the novel's controlling image, is letting one's 'rush-light burn bright.' Though Ellen reads *The Pilgrim's Progress* and evangelical hymns about depravity, the novel is Calvinist only in the most attenuated sense of the word. Both sin and salvation are interpreted in secular terms. Getting lost in a snowstorm, being mistreated by an aunt, losing a pony, not going to school—such earthly events cause misery, which in turn calls for divine remedy" (94). Everything around Ellen is a sign or test from God, so what she learns about Christianity is not separate from the wide, wide world.

end. Some scholars, however, persist in saying that Ellen lacks agency, and I will address those scholars throughout this chapter.

Ellen's (Religious) Texts

The majority of Ellen's agency comes through her growing knowledge of texts that teach her about God and His creations. Susan Warner was an avid reader and student, and she was part of a tradition of female, American authors. She thus resembles many other women, as Baym notes:

...along with much fiction, U.S. women published substantial quantities of other kinds of work including religious tracts; children's books; local-color sketches; village chronicles; plays; poetry in lyric, dramatic, and narrative form; translations; reviews; biographies; family memoirs; histories; travel books; textbooks in subjects from ancient history to botany, chemistry, geography, and astronomy; cookbooks and other works on domestic economy; advice books for girls, boys, young women, brides, and mothers; occasional essays; editorials; manifestoes. Women kept family journals, wrote family letters, edited newspapers and magazines, organized literary salons and won literary prizes. ("Women's" 335)³⁷

³⁷ Baym also notes: "So be it, for this approach enables one to see how the allegedly sentimental novelists take part in the general print project of U.S. women writers, which is simultaneously to claim a place for women in the public sphere—that is, the imaginary arena where public opinion takes shape, is debated, and influences national policy-making—and advise women on how to occupy this place effectively for their own good and the good of others. . . .The importance of print in this as in all U.S. women's movements from the eighteenth century onward cannot be overstated. It was a truism of Protestant ideology that the invention of the printing press made possible the religious and political enfranchisement of previously subjugated peoples. As well as consuming print products, women quickly moved to position themselves as producers. They argued successfully that print's invisibility, which allowed ideas to circulate independently of the bodies that created them, freed women from their sexualized identities and thus gave them a better chance to achieve parity with men" ("Women's" 339). We can see that Warner became a "producer," a bestselling author of increasingly religious and didactic texts.

In *The Wide, Wide World*, Warner created a character much like herself—a woman who read widely on every imaginable subject. Baym notes that, as a teen, Warner “received lessons from her father and father’s friends in music, Italian, French, painting and drawing, grammar, history, literature, geography, Greek, Latin, arithmetic, and botany. She was an intensely bookish girl, so much so that she was ordered into the country from time to time for her health. She developed a passion for riding horses, a characteristic of all her heroines” (*Woman’s* 141). As we see Ellen develop throughout the novel, she greatly resembles Warner.

The most important text in Ellen’s life is, of course, the Bible, which her mother purchases with Ellen before she and her husband send Ellen to upstate New York. Warner describes the scene as follows: “They stopped next at a bookstore. ‘Oh, what a delicious smell of new books!’ said Ellen, as they entered. ‘Mamma, if it wasn’t for one thing, I should say I never was so happy in my life.’ . . . Ellen’s wits were ready to forsake her. Such beautiful Bibles she had never seen; she pored in ecstasy over their varieties of type and binding, and was very evidently in love with them all” (29). This attention to the beauty of books—the words they contain as well as their outward appearance and construction—is a motif that is repeated throughout the novel. Reading and writing serve as comforts to Ellen while she is away from her mother. As Ellen states to her mother, “I think the greatest pleasure I shall have while you are gone will be writing to you. . . . and when I feel badly, I shall just shut myself up and write to you” (22). Both the acts of writing and receiving letters comfort Ellen, and her aunt is able to withhold that comfort by withholding some of Ellen’s letters from her mother, which I will discuss in more detail later.

As Ellen is separated from her mother, she begins her numerous hardships as she travels to and arrives at Aunt Fortune's house. Through these hardships, readers see Ellen become a true Christian in a land mixed between believers and nonbelievers. While traveling upstate, Ellen must accompany the Dunscombes—a girl, Margaret, about Ellen's age and Margaret's mother. They are so unkind that Ellen sits in miserable silence until they take a ferry and she meets a kind man, whom she calls her friend. This man talks to Ellen about Christianity and gives her a hymnal with his favorite songs marked. He gives Ellen the gift of reading hymns, just as her mother gave her the gift of reading the Bible. In fact, her mother gives her a gift that means so much to herself, spiritually. Before Ellen is sent upstate, Warner foreshadows that Mrs. Montgomery will die, as Mrs. Montgomery places her head onto an open page of her Bible, petitioning to let the “words be [her] memorial” and “be unto [Ellen] all thou hast been to [herself]” (42). She hopes to transfer her love of reading the Bible, as well as the grace of God, to Ellen. Kevin Ball discusses the gift of reading as follows:

Warner depicts reading and texts as gifts of power from the “grave protector” to Ellen. . . . In this instance, the gift of books serves first as a source of power for Ellen and later as a means of maintaining (or regaining) power lost to any weakening of her faith. . . . The book reminds Ellen of the temporary sense of power she felt when he read to her, and it strengthens her resolution as a means of defense against indecision. Later, in moments of doubt, Ellen draws the hymn-book from her pocket “to refresh herself with looking at it.” (11)

Throughout the rest of the novel, Ellen refers to this hymn book when she needs to be comforted and thinks of the kind man. Ball further argues, “In a striking contrast to earlier

scenes in which Ellen reads to her mother to console and calm her, the scene with Ellen's 'grave protector' locates the power of reading very much within the male guide figure" (11). Later, another male, John Humphreys, steps in as a male guide figure, furthering the notion that men are the readers and guides in this text.

However, Ellen still does have her female guides—her mother and John's sister, Alice—though they both die. Ellen's father is certainly no educational or spiritual guide; Warner suggests that he rarely reads as she states, "He [Ellen's father] took the newspaper, an uncommon thing for him, and pored over it most perseveringly..." (27). By contrast, as Ball states, "Under Alice's tutelage, Ellen begins to mature as a reader" (19). Warner also ties women to writing in a number of instances. One example that might go unnoticed is when Warner records a conversation between Ellen and her mother as they buy a writing desk and materials for Ellen: "'Do you know how to make a pen, Ellen?' 'No, mamma, not yet; but I want to learn very much. Miss Pichegru says that every lady ought to know how to make her own pens'" (34). Being a woman—and especially a "lady"—calls for some knowledge of not only writing but also being able to craft one's own writing utensils. Some scholars even point out the instances when the text seems to subvert male authority.

Voloshin takes this stance as she states the following:

The rebellion against male authority is suggested through some actions which Ellen's mother takes for the sake of her daughter. . . . She sells her jewelry to buy Ellen cloth, a sewing box, a Bible, and a writing desk and supplies. The details of the selection of the Bible and writing materials are so carefully described by the author that these objects take on special significance. By reading the Bible, Ellen learns one lesson her mother had begun to teach her, trust in God. The gift of the writing desk is actually

subversive. Mrs. Montgomery wants Ellen to be able to write, and in particular to write letters to her mother, without needing to rely on anyone for materials. . . .

Ellen's writing desk is thus a veiled symbol of female independence, economic and emotional. (289-90)

Ellen rejects authority elsewhere in the novel, but she still accepts advice and care from both male and female characters that she encounters. Overall, women influence Ellen just as much as men, so I would resist arguing that men are the more meaningful and powerful guides in *The Wide, Wide World*.

As Ellen is guided through her hardships and eventually takes control of her own actions, readers see how she becomes a model of Christian piety. Richard K. Ashford describes two types of young girls in nineteenth-century sentimental novels—tomboys and saints. Ellen Montgomery is the saint type; Ashford describes saints by saying, “Saints are girls reared in hostile, home environments that place them in considerable hardship. A strong religious background emphasizing piety, zeal, and submissiveness enables them to cope with the challenges of their domestic existence, and ultimately, through the agency of their faith, they transform the lives of those around them and gain a secure place in the world” (24). This is exactly Ellen's life, as she must live with a relative who does not want her; Aunt Fortune's behavior pushes Ellen to rely on God even more and seek out spiritual guides who help her overcome the negative feelings she has towards her aunt.

Aunt Fortune is one of Warner's characters who is not a practicing Christian; she is also not educated, believing that housework is more important and pressing than reading. Yet Ellen clings to her belief that reading will help her become a good Christian, which she must do in order to honor her pious mother. Ellen does learn how to “keep house” over the

course of her time with Aunt Fortune, but she also cultivates her mind and spirit. Elizabeth Fekete Trubey states, “As important as learning domestic skills is in the novel, these earthly trappings of woman’s place are insignificant compared to the broader concerns of salvation and Christian love” (63). Every spare moment that Ellen has after completing Aunt Fortune’s assigned tasks is devoted to reading her books and writing to her mother. Aunt Fortune’s aversion towards reading drives her to bar Ellen from reading as much as possible. Aunt Fortune does not read, herself, because of her social class, and she seems intimidated by the power that readers possess. As Ball notes, “For Ellen, these books represent her only means of maintaining a literacy power (and a maintenance of faith) in her powerless world” (13). Aunt Fortune must have all of the power in her household, so she seeks to get in the way of Ellen and her reading. The worst way she does this is by confiscating the letters that Ellen’s mother writes to Ellen.

On several occasions, Aunt Fortune wields her power over Ellen by stealing her letters, and Ellen can only eventually retrieve some of them through the help of Alice and the very un-Christian Nancy Vawse, who steals a letter from Aunt Fortune’s room. Ball points out the inherent power in withholding these letters as he states the following:

To Ellen, the letters represent notes of human contact from a loved one, and they therefore become prized possessions, family mementos that will renew her abilities to withstand the wilderness of her despair. The letters offer sympathy, solace, and moral instruction—powerful talismans of human contact—from her mother and spiritual advisor. To Miss Fortune, the letters serve as contact from a relative, but the possession of those letters represents a much more significant form of power for her: the power to control and dominate Ellen through her manipulation and withholding of

those letters. . . . Warner intends for the struggle to illustrate the issues of power embedded in all forms of writing. . . a struggle for mastery over the commodities of reading power. . . . With its ability to transform human experience, language possesses the ultimate form of power. (14)

Withholding these letters provides Ellen with one more hardship to endure, and she must try to forgive Aunt Fortune even while she, and Warner's readers, are fuming. Ball continues:

Access to Ellen's mother's letters grants Miss Fortune access to a literacy normally unavailable to members of her social class. Manipulation of the letters enables Miss Fortune to elevate herself, at least momentarily, to Ellen's class level, thus serving as a neutralizer. . . . if she were more literate, she might have been able to prolong or sustain her handling of the letter's subverted power. (16)

Eventually, Ellen is able to strip Aunt Fortune of this momentary elevation by reclaiming some of her letters. Aunt Fortune then loses this agency altogether when Ellen's mother dies and, hence, the letters stop coming and Ellen must move to Scotland, where she will overcome additional hardships.

Warner's attention to books and readings in *The Wide, Wide World* is extraordinary. Ellen is a model reader and student, as she steadfastly concentrates on her reading. Trubey remarks, "Just as when she reads the Bible, when examining secular materials Ellen's mind is focused only on the text in front of her and nothing else, and she closely reads each book several times. Ellen's emotional reactions to these other books are also similar to those she has to Bible verses" (65). Everything she reads elicits an intellectual and emotional response from her. Trubey further notes that Ellen's reading is an escape from her life with Aunt Fortune. She notes, "This escapism is a small-scale exercise of mental rebellion against the

domestic lot the world has set for her” (65). One of the most noticeable instances of this escapism and emotional reactions to a text is when John Humphreys unexpectedly gives Ellen a copy of Wiem’s *Life of Washington* for Christmas. As John gives Ellen the book, she says, ““What is this? Wime’s—Wiem’s—Life of Washington—Washington? he was—May I look at it?’ . . . She opened the book, and presently sat down on the floor where she was by the side of the sofa. Whatever she had found within the leaves of the book, she had certainly lost herself. An hour passed. Ellen had not spoken or moved except to turn over leaves” (329). Here, Ellen is at a loss for words, stumbling through her questions to John before becoming engrossed in her book—which she does not even know is hers yet because she believes it was a gift from someone else to John. Throughout the text, Ellen passes hours reading to others or to herself, especially reading the Bible, *The Life of Washington*, and *The Pilgrim’s Progress* multiple times.

Like the women in Apess’s *Experiences*, Ellen/Warner points out specific Bible verses that are particularly meaningful. One is Matthew 18, on “Christ’s infinite capacity to forgive trespasses” (Trubey 64; Warner page 157). It is this notion of forgiveness that most troubles Ellen, because she feels sinful and wonders if God can forgive her for not being a perfect Christian and for having doubts. Furthermore, she struggles to be Christ-like and forgive others, such as Aunt Fortune, for the wrongs they commit. Ellen’s negative feelings towards people haunt her, and Warner shows readers her struggles to rid herself of bad thoughts. Alice and John Humphreys continually mention specific Bible verses to Ellen as they instruct her on how to be a good Christian. Whenever Ellen is despairing because of her Aunt Fortune, Alice says such things as, ““Do you remember who said, “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest?””” (151) and ““Ellen, dear—he

whose hand raised up those mountains and has painted them so gloriously is the very same One who has said, to you and to me, “Ask and it shall be given you”” (153). Alice sets a positive example by constantly praising God’s works and picturing God as a personal guide and friend whose voice rings clear in the minds of those who will hear Him. When she tells Ellen that Aunt Fortune *will* let them study together—even though Ellen is unsure—Alice cries, ““That blessed Saviour! . . . oh, what should you and I do without him, Ellen?—“as rivers of waters in a dry place, as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land;”—how beautiful! how true! how often I think of that”” (176).

Alice even mentions Scripture as she instructs Ellen in botany: ““Shade is one of their uses, no doubt, and prettiness too; he who made the trees made them “pleasant to the eyes as well as good for food””” (186). Speaking of botany also reminds John of the Bible as he talks to Ellen. A flower ““reminds [him] of what [he] ought to be,”” and he recalls the verse, “Thou hast a few names that have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy” (324-5). These are just a handful of examples of moments when John and Alice are instructing Ellen in matters of the world and of God, weaving Bible verses into their discussions and lessons.

Ellen is not just talked *at*, though; she mentions Bible verses in response to Alice’s teachings, showing that she can become involved in a reciprocal conversation about Scripture. For example, Ellen mentions that she will not hate Aunt Fortune, but she does not know how she can like her. Alice responds, ““But remember, “charity suffereth long and is kind” . . . “I have a rich almighty friend, / Jesus the Saviour is his name, / He freely loves, and without end.””” Ellen picks up on Alice’s lesson, saying, “I was thinking of those words in the Psalms, . . . —“Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven; whose sin is covered”””

(222). Again and again, Ellen and Alice engage in conversations about Scripture and hymns, so Ellen becomes active in her own education.

When Ellen is not with Alice and John, though, she is still able to recall Bible verses as lessons to herself. Before long Ellen recalls Bible verses on her own as she chides herself for having ill feelings towards others. These lessons are especially needed after Ellen fights with Aunt Fortune or other children. For example, when she is not warmly invited into the circle of other young children, she goes to her room and reads the fifth chapter of Matthew—“Blessed are the meek. . . . Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.” After reading this, Ellen “strove to get back a pleasant feeling toward her young companions, and prayed that she might not be angry at any thing they should say” (317).

Some Bible themes reappear again and again as Ellen battles against ill feelings that return and becomes more Christian. Sharon Kim notes a repeated motif in the novel that reflects a specific Bible verse. She states that Warner “uses one Bible verse as a recurrent, structural element: ‘I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the LORD, which made heaven and earth’ (Psalm 121:1-2)” (798). Kim then points out how the image of the hills is repeated throughout the text: “Ellen observes Mr. Marshman ‘intently gazing toward the hills. . .’ (80)” (799); “Consumed with emotion, she leaves the house and goes to the hills. . . (148)” (800); “. . . the day after Alice’s death, Ellen goes out alone and looks ‘down into the brightening valley or off to the hills’ (442)” (800); John later quotes the verse on page 443 (800); and, finally, “This scene also retrospectively illuminates the previous scenes involving hills, distress, and comfort, a

recurrent pattern. When Ellen physically looks up to the hills, she is looking up spiritually to God, and each time, God sends her a Christian who can encourage and guide her” (800).³⁸

Verses that specifically discuss death also appear again and again. Near the beginning of the book, Ellen reads the infamous twenty-third psalm to her mother: “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me” (14-15). When reading to her mother—as was habitual—Ellen’s mother points her to “several passages in different parts of the Bible that speak of heaven and its enjoyments” (27). Before Ellen knows her mother has died, she despairs because her father and Aunt Fortune are acting strangely; she turns to her Bible and finds a comforting passage—“Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions” (344). Later, when Alice is sick, Ellen tells John that she has been thinking of the same verse, and ““thinking that mamma was there”” in God’s heavenly mansions (407). As Alice gets sicker, she thinks more about Lazarus, whom Jesus raised from the dead (427-8, 433). After Ellen’s death, John recites Bible verses that will comfort Ellen, such as, “for the Lord shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended” (442-3). These examples—and numerous others—show how discussions of death in the Bible both foreshadow death in the novel and also illustrate how the Bible can give people strength after losing loved ones. In these instances of sorrow, Ellen finds strength in her Bible.

However, *The Wide, Wide World* does not just point out specific Bible verses that Ellen reads; it also lives out some of those verses. As Henning notes, “Because the work

³⁸ To these quotes of Sharon Kim’s, I would add a passage I cite earlier, as Alice says while looking at the mountains with Ellen, ““Ellen, dear—he whose hand raised up those mountains and has painted them so gloriously is the very same One who has said, to you and to me, “Ask and it shall be given you””” (Warner 153).

comprises various instructive scenarios, each of which functions as its own parable—a story and lesson, often linked by transition scenes of horseback or boat ride—it seems more appropriate to read *The Wide, Wide World* as a series of biblical parables than as a linear narrative with a unified plot” (73). While I would argue that the book still has a linear narrative structure, it also reads as a religious text, its own Christian parable not unlike *The Pilgrim’s Progress*.³⁹

When Ellen meets her neighbors, her education increases. The Humphreys family consists of Alice, her minister father, and her brother, John, who is finishing seminary school. The Humphreys, particularly Alice and John, welcome Ellen into their family and provide a refuge from Aunt Fortune. They also instruct Ellen in all areas of Christianity and the world He created. John shares his library with Ellen, discussing books with her. As mentioned before, besides the Bible the most important books are *The Life of Washington* and John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Like *Washington*, Bunyan’s work is a gift from John. He sends her a package while he is away at seminary school, and she hastens to open it after doing her chores. Warner writes, “She was sure it had come from Doncaster; she was right. It was a beautiful copy of the ‘Pilgrim’s Progress,’—on the first leaf written, ‘To my little sister Ellen Montgomery, from J.H.;’ and within the cover lay a letter. This letter Ellen read in the course of the next six days at least twice as many times; and never without crying

³⁹ *The Pilgrim’s Progress* is quite appropriate for this book. Firstly, as David Hawkes notes in the book’s introduction, “For two hundred years, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* was, after the Bible, the most widely read book in the English-speaking world” (xvi). Ironically (or perhaps not), Ellen declares that her copy of the book is the most precious book she has, besides the Bible (Warner 367). The book is also a parable of prison, as Bunyan wrote it in prison; like Bunyan, Ellen is in her own type of prison. Finally, in the second book of *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, the character Prudence gives Christiana’s sons some advice that sounds like she could be talking directly to Ellen: “Then said *Prudence* to the boys, You must sill hearken to your Mother, for she can learn you more. You must also diligently give ear to what good talk you shall hear from others; for your sakes do they speak good things. Observe also, and that with carefulness, what the Heavens and the Earth do teach you; but especially be much in the meditation of that Book that was the cause of your Father’s becoming a Pilgrim” (Bunyan 249).

over it” (367). Both the letter and the text provide comfort for Ellen, especially since John included marginal notes in *Pilgrim’s Progress* to help Ellen understand some of the most noteworthy and difficult passages. Trubey notes, “John had been Ellen’s teacher, instructing her to find a paradigm of proper behavior in her Bible-reading; his annotations ensure that Ellen will read *Pilgrim’s Progress* in the same fashion” (66). Many scholars argue that John takes control of Ellen’s education, barring her from having any intellectual agency over the works she reads. Yet Ellen does evaluate *Pilgrim’s Progress* for herself; she spends half hours reading it (370), reads passages aloud to Mr. Van Brunt (412), and spends so much time studying it that Mr. Lindsay—Ellen’s uncle—confiscates the book (551-2). John is more of a tutor than a tyrant and, realistically, Bunyan’s work is quite complex even for adult readers. Scholars must acknowledge that Ellen is a child reading a sophisticated book, and who better to discuss it with her than John—the book’s previous owner and a minister-in-training?

With her neighbors, Ellen reads religious and secular texts, which go hand-in-hand. Henning discusses the importance of Ellen’s increasing knowledge base as he states the following:

Protagonist Ellen must widen her own nature and move step-by-step toward understanding herself as a Christian. Thus, a reader might gain enlightened understanding either directly from the author or by imitating the protagonist. Ellen’s first task is to dispel her own ignorance: she must learn both Christian moral principles and the lessons of secular texts. Using the circumstances of Ellen’s education ‘to enlighten the understanding’ of her readers, Warner writes with ‘perspicuity’ to provide the reader with this same information. (54)

Over the course of the novel, and especially during her talks with John and Mr. Van Brunt, Ellen learns and teaches readers about multiple disciplines that are important for life, in general. As Henning notes, “Eventually Ellen becomes able to function at an intellectual level she otherwise might never have attained” (55). She is able to view the world around her more clearly because she has learned about science, history, geography, botany, and other disciplines. Baym notes, “Not only does the novel report many of Ellen’s questions, it reports answers, thereby modestly introducing readers to diverse academic subjects including physics, astronomy, plant physiology, botany, chemistry, and history. When approached through a middle class rather than a rustic world view, the rural environment is translated from a venue of cheerless toil into a spectacular textbook of natural science” (Baym, “Women’s” 341). Readers are compelled to approach the world in Ellen’s manner, viewing the whole world in terms of God and His creations and expanding our own knowledge of secular texts and information. As Gillian Silverman notes, “The Bible, like the hymn-book, attests to the power of reading to band multiple subjects into an intimate community subordinated to the word of God” (par. 42). Indeed, every subject that Ellen studies is linked as part of God’s creation.

Henning further remarks on the importance of this secular education as she states the following:

Warner also combines Ellen’s religious and secular education with various challenging incidents to produce Ellen’s enlightened understanding. Where education acts to “dispel ignorance” (Campbell 2-3), incidents that test Ellen’s ability to direct her behavior according to her education act to “vanquish error.” For example, in order to deal with the several challenges posed by her abrasive aunt, Miss Fortune,

Ellen must dispel ignorance by studying scripture and vanquish error by applying the practical lessons she has learned from her scriptural studies. (57)

Ellen is challenged to take her lessons and apply them to her daily situations, and these lessons pull her through these hardships whereas she may have crumbled before. Eventually she becomes more confident and powerful, taking control over her own life while still getting along with those around her. Henning notes, “To come to real understanding, Ellen must use her biblical lessons to ‘vanquish’ the error of her behavior. . . . self-command and submission to God’s will can free one from earthly problems. Only by resigning one’s will to God can one triumph unscathed over one’s earthly trials” (58).

Towards the end of *The Wide, Wide World*, Ellen’s father dies, and she must acquiesce to his wishes to have her live in Scotland with his relatives, the Lindsays. While she tries to abide by their rules, she also must rebel in order to hang on to her Christianity and her reading, as the Lindsays are not practicing Christians. On her rebelliousness, Trubey states the following:

In Scotland, *Pilgrim’s Progress* serves to comfort Ellen in her separation from her loved ones, and at least for a while helps her to be passive and meek in the face of her uncle’s rules. However, when the Lindsays try her by taking away her copy of the book, her reaction to authority is not, as before, to cry uncontrollably (although she certainly does shed tears) but rather to argue with her uncle. . . . Although she must ultimately accede to her uncle’s wishes, Ellen temporarily imagines a new role for herself, one based in resistance and defense of her faith—the traits of a Christian hero—instead of in more feminine passive acceptance of higher authority. (68)

As Ellen faces continual trials and hardships, she becomes a female version of Christian in *The Pilgrim's Progress*, making the difficult choice to leave his family in order to find salvation.⁴⁰ Ellen must also fight to keep her daily hour of Bible-reading time. Ellen fights submissiveness as she speaks her mind, saying to her aunt Lindsay, “‘I thing [*sic*] it is right to disobey if I am told to do what is wrong,’ said Ellen in a low voice. ‘Are you to be the judge of right and wrong?’ ‘No, ma’am.’ ‘Who then?’ ‘The Bible. . . . I must have that hour; I cannot do without it’” (542). The Lindsays initially bar Ellen from having her Bible time, but they eventually give in because Ellen is miserable without her Bible studies. Bible reading becomes an act of resistance and defiance as Ellen insists on keeping her daily hour.

In her new surroundings with the Lindsays, “Ellen undergoes a spiritual crisis which she resolves through her reading. . . . At the most crucial moments in Ellen’s life, reading—whether of letters, the Bible, or other texts—serves as a genesis and source of life for her. Literacy enables Ellen to adapt to each new situation and challenging circumstance” (Ball 21). She faces Mr. Lindsay’s challenge and fights for her right to read. As Ball notes, “Although Lindsay continues to deprive Ellen of her book in order to break her pride . . . even he recognizes the role of reading in ‘making her what she was’” (22). Ellen will acquiesce to a point, but she will not give up her Bible and her Christian ways.

Ultimately, as the novel ends, readers can see how books have helped shape Ellen into a strong Christian woman. Many scholars argue that Ellen is still powerless at the end of the novel because she becomes John’s wife, fulfilling the typical formula of the sentimental novel.⁴¹ Yet I argue that Ellen still maintains control over her life. She moves back to

⁴⁰ Or Ellen is Christiana, Christian’s wife and the subject of the second book of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Christian finds salvation in the first book alone, because his family won’t follow him. In the second book, his family repents and follows him to salvation.

⁴¹ See particularly Catharine O’Connell.

America with John—living in the town she calls home with the man she really loves. John also declares that the library is both of theirs, and the doors between their rooms and the library will be left open (577). In this final, previously unpublished chapter, Ellen and John seem less like newlyweds and more like fellow scholars, as they spend much of the chapter admiring books and paintings.

As Sharon Kim notes, the fact that John and Ellen have gotten married by the end of the novel is not the most central part of the novel. Rather, “*The Wide, Wide World* is a spiritual bildungsroman; instead of ending in marriage or Ellen’s triumph as a teacher or lady novelist, it ends with the maturation of her character” (801). Ellen is still the focus of the text, and she is always seen as Ellen and not Mrs. John Humphreys. Henning notes, “Near the end of the story, Warner explicitly articulates ‘enlargement of her own powers’ (519) as an important element of understanding. When John has helped Ellen become intellectually free, Ellen becomes his intellectual equal” (56). Henning also notes that both the published and unpublished endings of the book show Ellen’s new sense of power:

By the end of the nineteenth-century version of the book, Ellen exhibits a firmly established will:

To Mr. Lindsay and his mother she was the idol of life, except when, by chance, her will might cross theirs. She had what she wished and did what she pleased....
‘I will do what I think right come what may.’ (538-41)

The end of the story as republished in the twentieth century (1987) and including an originally unpublished final chapter...similarly shows a respect on the part of the supporting characters for Ellen’s will. Ellen’s new husband John spares no effort or expense to satisfy Ellen. (69)

John and Ellen become more and more like equals by the end of the story. John is one of Ellen's many guides through her adolescence, and Ellen becomes a guide for her readers.

We see Ellen reading and, in turn, *The Wide, Wide World* serves as its own spiritual guide for readers, instructing us what and how to read.⁴² Trubey states this as follows:

Ellen is herself a model for the girls who read *The Wide, Wide World*; like Christian and Washington she has the power to influence by example. . . . The final result of this exploration is outward passivity, but in women's inner minds, there is still room for vividly imagined acts of female rebellion and resistance. The strength is not in the decision to submit, but rather in the ability to imagine alternatives. (73)⁴³

Ellen learns the importance of reading, and Warner's readers get the same message and now have a model to follow. Warner's life history helps explain why she would have set up her book in this way, with such specific passages on reading and its merits. Silverman illuminates this as follows:

Susan Warner shared with her sister this belief in literacy as a means towards attrition and expressed it both in her journal entries and in many of her best-selling novels of

⁴² Warner even includes epigraphs before each chapter—just one more way that she infuses her book with examples of great literature that readers can turn to after reading *The Wide, Wide World*. She references two female authors but largely sticks to Shakespeare, Longfellow, and songs.

⁴³ Sharon Kim also discusses Warner's appeal to readers, Christian and non-Christian: "Warner, however, understood that she had to engage multiple readerships. She wrote this novel because her family needed money; it was written to sell. At the same time, Warner was an evangelical Christian. While incorporating unpleasant Calvinist concepts, she sought to make her religion viable, even appealing, to those who did not share it. More pointedly, Warner held to that form of Puritanism that posited a category of people who thought they were Christians but probably weren't. That Calvinism was a prominent force in American Protestantism made little different to Warner, since she distinguished between a Christian culture and actual Christianity. Instead of simply satisfying her audience, even an audience with moral tastes and habits, she wanted to challenge, convert, and instruct them in true religion. This belief probably informs Anna Warner's statement, much maligned by twentieth-century critics, that Susan Warner wrote *The Wide, Wide World* 'upon her knees'—that is, 'in closest reliance upon God: for thought, for power, and for words. Not the mere vague wish to write a book that should do service to her Master: but a vivid, constant, looking to him for guidance and help. . . .' (SW, 264). Anna Warner's distinction between the 'mere vague wish' to serve God and a 'looking to him for guidance and help' limns a particular relationship to God, a way of being a Christian, that marks the Warners and the religious views they wanted to promote" (805).

the antebellum period. For both women, the activities of reading and writing constituted some of the “fine and sharpened tools” through which subjects achieved self-reduction. (par. 4)

The importance of reading for women weighed on Warner’s mind, and *The Wide, Wide World* is a testament to that preoccupation. As Baym notes, “Learning becomes a way of taking charge of one’s life, so that the novel might be read as a demonstration of how to grow beyond sentimentalism” (Baym, “Women’s” 342).

Ellen’s many struggles provide readers with a model of Christian behavior that they can follow. We see her entire religious conversion and all of her struggles along the way. Ball discusses Ellen as a model by stating the following:

Because Ellen’s reading of the Bible and other texts serves as a predominant source of that constant “help,” to read *The Wide, Wide World* thus requires readers to identify with Ellen both as a naïve young woman as well as a naïve reader in her struggles to control the circumstances of her life. . . . Warner embeds inset scenes involving reading strategically throughout her narrative to illustrate Ellen’s journey as a reader as well as to emphasize Ellen’s role in modeling the act of reading. (8)

Since Ellen is the heroine of the novel, readers should want to model themselves after her example. As Ball notes, “The fact that reading well is one of Ellen’s most valued attributes as a heroine reflects the value of literacy, the process of developing a social and moral self through language, in Warner’s estimation” (9). Reading *The Wide, Wide World* is one step that readers can take towards cultivating their own literacy, and Ellen provides a list of other works they can read to further their progress.

Hymns, Oratory, and Preaching

Some scholars note that Ellen lacks a voice in *The Wide, Wide World*. For instance, Catharine O'Connell states the following:

Ellen's subjectivity is not, and cannot be, asserted through the usual modes of speech or action. In terms of the plot, she is much less subject than object, acted upon by every authority figure in the novel. She can never revolt, but she can suffer and she does so exquisitely. Feeling becomes the means of establishing narrative authority and authenticity not only more than speech or action, but frequently in opposition to them. (par. 13)

Ellen's feelings *are* ever-present in the text, and her suffering does push her towards her Bible. Her sorrow allows readers to feel for her as the protagonist. Yet O'Connell's assertions that Ellen does not possess usual modes of speech and cannot revolt are not entirely accurate. While Ellen lacks authority at the beginning of the text because she is a very young child, does not lean on God, and has no experience in the world, she becomes a much more confident and learned individual as the plot progresses. Her voice is cultivated inside, as she reads and thinks to herself; then her voice extends outside of her body as she meets people who treat her like a person who is capable of holding meaningful conversations.

Reading silently helps Ellen become a better Christian, but she also becomes more adept at proselytizing to others as the book progresses. Ellen's friend and surrogate sister, Alice, sets this example by proselytizing to Ellen as soon as they meet. Ellen begins as a girl who lacks confidence and cannot speak up for herself; this is evinced at the beginning of the text when she tries to buy cloth at a store and cannot articulate herself. A friendly, older man

steps in to help her, acting as her voice. The store clerk hesitates to help Ellen at all, and then he lies to her about the prices of the cloth. The old man is better equipped to stand up to the clerk as he notices Ellen's distress (47-50). One could argue that Ellen is submissive and mistreated because she is a woman and her "grave protector" is a man. Yet money and age also contribute to Ellen's powerlessness. Together, Ellen's gender, class, and young age detract from her agency until she learns to use her voice.

Later in the book, Ellen will have a more sexualized encounter with Mr. Saunders, the young man who works at the fabric counter; at this early point in the novel, though, he looks at Ellen as a poor child who is wasting his time. He asks what she would like to see, "as if he had a business on hand he would like to be rid of"—namely, her (46). He tries to make her hurry, tossing cloth samples in front of her and pushing her to select one. When he asks if the green cloth is good enough, Ellen says her mother doesn't like green. Mr. Saunders replies, "Why don't she come and choose her stuffs herself, then? What colour *does* she like?" (47). They continue to go through fabric, but the ones that Ellen likes are too expensive. Mr. Saunders will not give Ellen a sample of cloth to take to her mother, saying, "we can't cut up our goods; if people don't choose to buy of us they may go somewhere else, and if you cannot decide upon any thing I must go and attend to those that can. I can't wait here all day." Saunders then tells his boss, "Why, I've been here this half hour showing cloths to a child that doesn't know merino from a sheep's back,' said he, laughing. And some other customers coming up at the moment, he was as good as his word, and left Ellen, to attend to them" (48). Saunders's language and mannerisms suggest that he does not want to be tied up with an indecisive child.

By contrast, the old man has experience in the world whereas Ellen is just a child; he is also somewhat wealthy, whereas Ellen is unsure about which cloth she can afford to buy. When the old “gentleman,” Mr. Shopman,⁴⁴ instructs Mr. Saunders to come back to his post at the merino counter, “Mr. Saunders [comes] up with an altered countenance” and responds in a soft voice to Shopman (48). Saunders knows that Shopman “must not be offended,” and he tells Shopman the *actual* prices of the cloth, which he had inflated when talking to Ellen (49). Saunders wishes to have his revenge on Ellen and Shopman, but he bites his tongue; Warner foreshadows that Saunders will catch up with Ellen later in the book. Meanwhile, when Shopman talks with Ellen’s mother, he implies that her age was involved in Saunders’s actions. He states, “I presume you do not need to be told, ma’am, that her behaviour was such as would have become any years. I assure you, ma’am, if I had had no kindness in my composition to feel for the *child*, my honour as a gentleman would have made me interfere for the *lady*” (50). He further states, ““There are all sorts of people in this world, and a little one alone in a crowd is in danger of being trampled upon”” (51). Shopman reminds readers that, though Ellen may act like a lady, she is still a child; all people might not take her seriously in the wide, wide world.

Later, after Ellen receives her Bible and hymn book and goes to live with Aunt Fortune, she sings and reads aloud—just as she did with her mother. More and more frequently, she can be found reading to her grandmother, who lives with Aunt Fortune. Warner writes the conversation as follows:

⁴⁴ Shopman’s name is obviously a play on words, as is Aunt Fortune’s (Miss Fortune).

“Grandma, wouldn't you like to have me read something to you?” “Read?” answered the old Lady, “Laws a me! I don't ready nothing, deary.”⁴⁵ “But wouldn't you like to have me read to you, grandma?” The old lady in answer to this laid down her knitting, folded both arms round Ellen, and kissing her a great many times declared she should like any thing that came out of that sweet little mouth. As soon as she was set free Ellen brought her Bible, sat down close beside her, and read chapter after chapter; rewarded even then by seeing that though her grandmother said nothing she was listening with fixed attention, bending down over her knitting as if in earnest care to catch every word. (245)

Pretty soon, Ellen reads to her grandmother regularly. She also sings to several characters, who love the sound of her voice. Ellen sings to Mr. Humphreys on several occasions, especially after Alice dies. She sings “How sweet the name of Jesus sounds,” “Loving Kindness,” “’Tis my happiness below,” “Jerusalem, my happy home,” “How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,” “Jesus lover of my soul,” and “What are these in bright array” (451-3). As Warner notes, “she was very apt when the darkness fell to take to singing hymns; and it grew to be a habit with Mr. Humphreys when he heard her to come out of his study and lie down upon the sofa and listen, suffering no light in the room but that of the fire. . . . She sung with wonderful pleasure when she sung for him” (467-8). Ellen becomes a daughter to Mr. Humphreys, as everyone in the Humphreys family wants her to join them; Ellen never becomes extremely close to Mr. Humphreys, but when she sings to him she does seem closer to him than she seems to be with her biological father. Singing is an enjoyment that Ellen will not give up, even when she is no longer in the company of her American

⁴⁵ Warner does not state whether or not Ellen’s grandmother is literate. If not, then Ellen’s abilities to read say a lot about the educational advances of American women over the course of three generations.

friends; defiantly, she exerts her will and hangs on to a piece of home, which always included singing.

Later, Ellen even sings in Uncle Lindsay's company, though he and his family find Ellen to be too pious. On one occasion, Warner writes, "Her door was a little ajar, and he softly opened it without disturbing her. Ellen was still sitting on the floor before the window, looking out through it, and in rather a low tone singing the last verse of the hymn 'Rock of Ages'" (545). Uncle Lindsay then asks Ellen to sing to him. Warner writes, "Ellen was heartened by the tone of his voice, and pleased with the request. She immediately sang with great spirit a little Methodist hymn she had learned when a mere child. The wild air and simple words singularly suited each other. 'O Canaan—Bright Canaan...'" (546). Although the Lindsays constantly remark that Ellen is too grave and pious, Ellen defiantly chooses to sing a religious song to her uncle—and he listens. Throughout the text, Warner prints the words of the hymns that Ellen sings, so readers can almost hear Ellen's voice ringing out while getting their own lessons in hymnody.

Ellen is greatly influenced by the words of Alice Humphreys, who preaches as if she was a minister like her father. Before she dies, she offers Ellen words of wisdom on numerous occasions, many of which I have mentioned above. While many scholars argue that men hold power over oratory and reading in the novel, Jana L. Angersinger discusses the importance of Alice as follows:

A "feminine" version of ecclesiastical oratory does speak in Warner's novels, through Alice, who regularly and persuasively "preaches" to homebound members of her father's congregation. When Miss Fortune remarks that she ought to be a minister, Alice demurs and says that she prefers to "preach without taking orders" (217); with

this choice of phrase, Warner intimates that a woman may find liberation in unlicensed preaching even while she feels guilty about overstepping boundaries—and further, Warner allows something yet more unhallowed to slip through the interstices of language: the woman who preaches need not be nun-like. (269)

Alice acts as a foil to Aunt Fortune because she is educated, eloquent, and well-liked. Aunt Fortune frowns upon Alice, seemingly jealous of her. While people enjoy listening and talking to Alice, Aunt Fortune is noted for her improper speech. She says “ain’t” frequently throughout the text, and Ellen picks up the word. At one point, Alice has to correct Ellen’s grammar because she begins to speak like Aunt Fortune:

“It was very kind, I think. But do you know Ellen, I am going to have a quarrel with you?” “What about?” asked Ellen. “I don’t believe it’s any thing very bad, for you look pretty good-humoured, considering.” “Nothing very bad,” said Alice, “but still enough to quarrel about. You have twice said ‘ain’t’ since I have been here.” “Oh,” said Ellen, laughing, “is that all?” “Yes,” said Alice, “and my English ears don’t like it at all.” (221)

Ellen notes that she never used to say it, but Warner frequently shows her readers that Aunt Fortune uses improper grammar when she speaks and degrades reading and education.

Though Alice is a model of how a woman can preach but not be nun-like, Angersinger argues that Ellen ends up preaching more in John’s style than Alice’s. I meet Angersinger halfway, arguing that Ellen still has a style all her own—one that both Alice and John add to, but without subtracting Ellen’s individual voice. Angersinger notes that, while Ellen tries to fill the void that Alice leaves behind upon her death, she takes up a rhetorical style that “more strongly recalls the magnetic John than the angelic Alice. Moreover, while

Warner manifests through Ellen her lust to preach like a man, her transgression goes deeper: she wants to tell stories like a novelist, stories not dissimilar to those John prohibits Ellen herself from reading” (269). Ellen’s speech and the books she reads are certainly intertwined; while employing John’s rhetorical style, Ellen alters that style by evincing her love of novels. By spending time with Alice and John, Ellen absorbs their power over language. As Angersinger notes, “through John’s kisses, always mouth-to-mouth, Ellen has, on Warner’s behalf, absorbed his power over language—subverting the venerable Christian tradition of the religio-erotic kiss, which symbolizes the passing of the Father’s Word to the human soul” (276).⁴⁶ The power is transferred, but I argue that Ellen’s own particular style remains and allows her to speak for herself as she encounters hardships or proselytizes to people such as Mr. Van Brunt and Nancy Vawse.

While proselytizing to Mr. Van Brunt, Ellen uses the power of her voice and angelic being, which captivates him from the moment she arrives at Aunt Fortune’s. As Ball notes:

On the most spiritually significant level, reading—especially reading out loud—possesses the ultimate power of salvation. . . . [Ellen seeks] to convert [Mr. Van Brunt]—through the most powerful activity she knows: reading. Ellen plans her readings to Mr. Van Brunt carefully and deliberately like a preacher planning his sermons. She chooses passages that are “most likely to take hold of his judgment of feelings” (412) in hopes of leading him to salvation. (23)

⁴⁶ Jana L. Angersinger continues these sexually-charged arguments. For instance, she states: “The most compelling figure of authorship in *The Wide, Wide World* is finally the seductive little girl, a girlish Madonna-Magdalen, whose eroticized relations with family show Warner either submitting to paternal authority or trying to substitute ties of mutuality, but at the same time leaning irresistibly toward fatherly dominance herself. By projecting the writer as child, Warner assumes a Christian humility she wants to desire; but by investing that child with a surprisingly sexual sway over admirers, she at the same time covertly identifies with the charismatic male preacher” (277). Angersinger invests Ellen with quite a bit of power throughout the novel, and this power is sexual. While I agree with much of what Angersinger says, I do not follow this particular thread here.

Ellen eventually succeeds in converting Mr. Van Brunt. She speaks to him about hymns and Christianity. Warner notes a conversation where Ellen asks him, “‘Mr. Van Brunt,—don’t *you* love hymns?’ ‘I don’t know much about ’em, Miss Ellen’ ‘Mr. Van Brunt, are you one of that fold?’ ‘What fold?’ ‘The fold of Christ’s people.’ ‘I’m afeard not, Miss Ellen,’ said he soberly, after a minute’s pause.” (215-16). Later, Ellen “had secretly brought her *Pilgrim’s Progress* with her, and now with marvellous [*sic*] satisfaction drew it forth. ‘I ha’n’t been as much of a reader as I had ought to,’ said Mr. Van Brunt, as she opened the book and turned to the first page” (412). After spending years talking to Mr. Van Brunt about Christianity, readers see that Mr. Van Brunt wants to be a good Christian like Ellen; he likes the person she has become, and he even starts reading the Bible (487).

When John visits Ellen in Scotland, he brings her news of Mr. Van Brunt’s conversion: “. . . Have you heard of your old friend Mr. Van Brunt?’ ‘No—what of him?’ ‘He has come out before the world as a Christian man.’ ‘Has he!’ John took a letter from his pocket and opened it. ‘You may see what my father says of him’” (565). Shortly after hearing the news, Ellen does read the letter in full. One section reads as follows:

Mr. Van Brunt has lately joined our little church. This has given me great pleasure. He had been a regular attendant for a long time before. He ascribes much to your instrumentality; but says his first thoughts (earnest ones) on the subject of religion were on the occasion of a tear that fell from Ellen’s eye upon his hand one day when she was talking to him about the matter. (569)

This reference to Ellen’s tear on Van Brunt’s hand recalls several moments when Ellen discusses religion with Van Brunt—singing hymns, reading the Bible, and talking to him about how important it is to be a Christian. Ellen’s Christian example never leaves Mr. Van

Brunt, even after she goes to Scotland. He always loved to hear her voice as she sang hymns and read to him. Spiritual guides convert Ellen, and she succeeds in converting Mr. Van Brunt and, possibly, some of Warner's readers.

Through reading and singing to others, as well as using her voice while learning French from Mrs. Vawse and speaking with the Humphreys about multiple disciplines, Ellen becomes adept at using her voice. By the time she reaches the Lindsays in Scotland, she no longer has an advocate to speak for her, but she also no longer needs one. She is able to speak for herself as she defends her country, education, and religion. Shortly after arriving, the Lindsays draw Ellen into a conversation about England versus America. Warner writes:

“But Ellen,—these Americans forfeited entirely the character of good friends to England and good subjects to King George.” “Yes, but it was King George's fault, uncle; he and the English forfeited their characters first.” “I declare,” said Mr. Lindsay laughing, “if your sword had been as stout as your tongue, I don't know how I might have come off in that same encounter.” “I hope Ellen will get rid of these strange notions about the Americans,” said Lady Keith discontentedly. “I hope not, aunt Keith,” said Ellen. “Where did you get them?” said Mr. Lindsay. . . . “In reading, sir; reading different books;—and talking.” “Reading!—So you did read in the backwoods? . . . What have you read on this subject?” “Two lives of Washington, and some in the Annual Register, and part of Graham's United States; and one or two other little things.” “But those gave you only one side, Ellen; you should read the English account of the matter.” “So I did, sir; the Annual Register gave me both sides; the bills and messages were enough.” (506)

Though Ellen's relatives mock her, she is able to hold her own during this conversation and others. Readers can see Ellen's ethos as she recalls books she has read, even if her relatives do not appreciate her education. Interestingly, Ellen notes that both reading and talking are important aspects of her education; silent and oral studying both contribute to her learning.

Later, Ellen shows more confidence as she displays her humor and wit. Warner writes one conversation between Ellen and her relatives: “‘Can you sing?’ [asks uncle Lindsay.] ‘I can sing hymns.’ ‘Sing hymns! That’s the only fault I find with you, Ellen,—you are too sober.’ . . . ‘Can you sing nothing but hymns?’ asked Lady Keith. ‘Yes, ma’am,’ said Ellen, with some humour twinkling about her eyes and mouth,—‘I can sing “Hail Columbia!”’” (508). Here, though Ellen's relatives mock her sober character, she shows her humorous side while injecting her answer with some American patriotism. Ellen does not apologize for being a proud American, and she also does not apologize for being a Christian; she is proud of singing hymns and is even defiant in this moment when, instead of singing the religious songs that her relatives believe are too sober, she further aggravates them by singing a patriotic, American song.

Ellen humbly displays more of her knowledge as she speaks with her uncle: “‘So you have read Scottish history as well as American, Ellen?’ ‘Not very much, sir; only the Tales of a Grandfather yet. But what made me say that,—I have read an account of Holyrood House somewhere’” (512). Readers know that Ellen has actually read quite a bit of history and absorbs so much of her texts that she probably retains just about all of the knowledge she accrues on various subjects. During a later conversation, Ellen gives Uncle Lindsay a brief lesson on Christ and displays her knowledge of Scottish history:

“Jesus Christ said, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life; no man cometh unto the Father but by me.’” . . . “Stirling Castle,” said Mr. Lindsay, smiling at Ellen’s clasped hands of delight,—“and what do you know of Stirling castle?” “From the history, you know, sir; and the Lord of the Isles,—‘Old Stirling’s towers arose in light—. . . / And twined in links of silver bright / Her winding river lay.’” . . . “Go on and tell me all you can remember.” “*All*; that would be a great deal, sir.” (514)

Ellen cannot even discuss all of the information she knows just on Stirling Castle. Readers see that Ellen is experiencing a new part of the world as she goes to Scotland, but her studies had also already taught her much about the world around her. She is not such a submissive young girl anymore.

In fact, at a party with the Lindsays and their friends, Ellen takes part in a conversation about history in French (522-3). The partygoers (except for her female relatives) seem to view Ellen as a highly intelligent member of their social circle, and they enjoy talking to her as an adult. By this time, Ellen has the confidence to speak her mind more. At one point, she wants to go to church even though her relatives will not attend. Warner writes: “Sunday came; her first Sunday in Edinburgh. All went to church in the morning; in the afternoon Ellen found that nobody was going; her grandmother was lying down. She asked permission to go alone. ‘Do you want to go because you think you must? or for pleasure?’ said Mrs. Lindsay. ‘For pleasure!’ said Ellen’s tongue and her opening eyes at the same time” (531). Ellen’s tongue seems to have a mind of its own here, as readers hear her voice ring out and declare what she desires. This is the new Ellen that readers encounter, because she has learned to use her voice.

Concluding Remarks

In *The Wide, Wide World*, Warner presents the bildungsroman of a non-Christ-like girl who becomes an example of spirituality. Through reading, singing, and preaching to those around her, she combines the best qualities of the many mentors she encounters in the novel. Her advancement serves as a model to Warner's readers—particularly young women who seek to become better Christians and human beings by cultivating knowledge, eloquence, and kindness. Voloshin notes that “Ellen is not as independent as the typical heroine in novels of this sort.” However, Warner's text still “expresses female hostility to male power over women and female desire for independence in a covert way, and this covert content is particularly notable because the overt and often repeated message of *The Wide, Wide World*, as of many of the women's novels of mid-century, is submission in affliction” (289). For a while, Ellen must submit to her circumstances because she has no other viable option—she is a child, after all.

Yet, like Cooper and Apess, Warner does not *expect* to turn the world on its head; all of these authors would like to see changes made, but they know that white/male resistance will make any changes gradual and difficult. Therefore, Warner works within conventions⁴⁷ but stretches them in order to show that what some women actually *are* doing is not detrimental to the fabric of American life. As Trubey states:

⁴⁷ In the Afterword to *The Wide, Wide World*, Jane Tompkins notes, “The belief that one does not control the circumstances of one's life but must learn instead to become reconciled to them informed the outlook of many people in the antebellum era. . . . Learning to resign oneself to the will of God was not regarded as cowardly or defeatist behavior but as a realistic way of meeting the facts of life. Contrary to the modern critical view that popular women's novels were escapist and unable to deal with grim facts, the strength of such novels lay precisely in showing what it is like to face facts you cannot change and live with them day by day” (593). Tompkins makes a good point here about conventions; while modern readers may be angered by the seeming submissiveness of Ellen, Warner has not created a character that is somehow more submissive than the conventional nineteenth-century, American woman.

Warner does not promote a wholesale revision of traditional, passive, womanhood in *The Wide, Wide World*, but she also does not accept this role uncritically. Rather, she uses the novel to imagine a different model of femininity, one based not in docility but in strength and assertiveness, while ultimately opting to defend a safer, more traditional place for women. More specifically, what Warner does is suggest that even though Ellen ultimately accedes to submission and domesticity, she possesses the all-important ability to imagine a new position for herself. Using the very skills with which she interprets the Bible, she can think herself out of her home and into the world. (72)⁴⁸

Ultimately, Ellen's marriage seems more like a choice than submission. As Ellen lives back in the woods of upstate New York, readers have no doubt that she will continue to explore the world outside of her domestic sphere while still taking advantage of the books that lie at home. She will also, no doubt, continue to use her powerful singing voice to express herself. Perhaps the most important message here is that Ellen does not have to choose between one life or the other; she can have both.

⁴⁸ Trubey also notes: "By calling Ellen's submission to authority a 'self-willed act of conquest of one's passions' and, therefore 'an assertion of autonomy,' Tompkins spawned a critical discourse that focuses on the potential for female resistance within the outwardly repressive world Warner creates for her heroine" (58). Indeed, Ellen's story is not about striking a new path for women that flies in the face of conventions; rather, it is about resisting those who would strip women of any sense of autonomy. Voloshin also notes, "Gentility triumphs, and there is no need for forthright revolt, partly, perhaps, because of the symbolic maiming of the cruel father, whose power over his wife and daughter fades after his financial failure" (291). Warner will not have Ellen revolt just for the sake of revolting. She has proven that she can speak her mind and obtain what she wants; she has made the choice to submit to God, but the people around her do not demand the same submission.

Conclusion: Reconstructing Our Notions of Agency

Writing about the power of Christian women in America, Shirley Wilson Logan notes, “This idea that woman’s power resided chiefly in her ability to influence decision makers was a common topos of nineteenth-century women’s discourse” (39). In order to rethink the roles that women played in nineteenth-century America—and the roles they have played across nationalities, ethnicities, and histories—we must rethink our definition of “power” and how this topos of influence manifests itself in texts by and about women. Scholars in women’s studies have begun to broaden many definitions in the past few decades, rethinking how we define and discuss “literature,” “gender,” and numerous other terms that can be essentialist;⁴⁹ I suggest that we look at a broader range of primary texts, rethinking what “texts,” “rhetoric,” and “agency” can mean, as they are not one-dimensional terms. We can take acts of speaking, singing, drawing, writing, and choosing *not* to speak as indicators and exercises of agency and influence. Moreover, we can focus our attention on nineteenth-century American texts that have been ignored or forgotten, including texts that are not “texts” in a traditional sense (e.g., letters, speeches, sermons, hymns).

If we broaden our conceptions of how women had and lacked power, then we can open our eyes to the gains that American women made in the nineteenth century. Logan notes, “Although black and white women were generally accepted as evangelists, preachers, and missionaries in most church denominations by the early nineteenth century, they were not expected to speak publicly on political matters” (33). Women were more accepted in the religious sphere, so they could gain more power and agency there than they could in politics.

⁴⁹ In terms of my work in rhetoric and on this thesis, I immediately think of Glenn’s *Rhetoric Retold* and *Unspoken*; Hobbs; and Ritchie and Ronald.

They started with permissible topoi—Christian practices, especially through singing hymns and reading the Bible—and appropriated the power that came from using their voices both in writing and orally.

If we examine these possessions and lacks of agency, we can see how women could claim agency in one sphere and then, over time, apply that agency to other spheres. In other words, nineteenth-century American women had power in the domestic sphere and were held up as examples of Christian piety; from there, they could justify reading and writing religious texts, as well as using their voices to sing religious songs—both in their homes and in more public spaces; from there, more doors might open to women that would allow them to speak and write for public audiences more frequently. Women’s agency was and is fluid, and texts written about and/or by women—across many races—exemplify and illuminate this.

Oftentimes, contemporary audiences construct a view of women as completely powerless, almost shackled to the hearth. Nan Johnson sums up the space between our assumptions and reality quite nicely:

From the postbellum decades to the early twentieth century, a variety of popular publications including periodicals, rhetoric manuals, conduct manuals, and biographies of famous Americans reinforced the generally held opinion that the powerful speakers and writers who shaped the fabric of American life ought to be distinguished, white men. This popular construction of rhetorical power as properly residing only in the hands of white men runs contrary to the historical fact of wide participation by white and African American female orators and writers in the rhetorical life of the nation and indicates that the tensions being played out on the nineteenth-century field of rhetoric were more complex than we yet understand. How

were rhetorical practices and gender roles entwined in the public mind? What cultural conversations sustained that fusion? What do those conversations reveal about why the rhetorical careers and activities of nineteenth-century women were omitted from historical record? (14)

Women's rhetoric and agency *are* complex areas of study, and studying texts such as Cooper's, Apess's, and Warner's shed some light on different ways that women were using agency—women who were either ignored or figured as powerless. The questions that Johnson asks will take years to answer, and they cannot be answered completely, because we cannot fully place ourselves in the nineteenth-century culture, across geography, genders, and races.

However, looking to women in texts will ultimately shed some light on these questions and others—questions about how, where, and when women constructed and expanded their agency. Indeed, the agency of nineteenth-century women is not “omitted from historical record” (in Johnson's words) as much as it has yet to be fully studied. Rereading familiar texts and (re)discovering marginalized texts reveals, among other things, the abilities of women to claim power as Christians.

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ABSTRACT

PRAYER AND PREACHING: FEMALE RELIGIOUS AGENCY IN COOPER, APESS, AND WARNER

by Lisa Michelle Thomas, M.A., 2007
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This project addresses the issue of women's agency (i.e., power) in nineteenth-century America, specifically how women worked within gender and religious conventions in order to exert power. The texts that are highlighted are James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), William Ape's *The Experiences of Five Christian Indians* (1833), and Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1851). The acts of singing hymns, reading the Bible, and preaching/proselytizing allowed women to use their voices in religious affairs, which could then allow women more opportunities to read other texts and voice their opinions. By reevaluating female characters in Cooper's, Ape's, and Warner's texts—characters who are often either ignored or portrayed as powerless—scholars can note that these women claim agency in sometimes subtle and sometimes overt ways, acting within society's conventions while using their voices to convert, sway, resist, please, and teach others.