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CATHARINE MARIA SEDGWICK: AN AMERICAN LITERARY BIOGRAPHY

*City University of New York*

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CATHARINE MARIA SEDGWICK:  
AN AMERICAN LITERARY BIOGRAPHY

by

JANE GILES

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate  
Faculty in English in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy, The City University  
of New York.

1984

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This manuscript has been read and accepted by the Graduate Faculty in English in satisfaction of the dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

17 April 1964  
date

Charles C. Prescott  
Chairman of Examining Committee

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The City University of New York

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In deference to the Modern Language Association, I have reluctantly omitted the word "Miss" from before the name of Catharine Sedgwick.

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Jane Giles

New York City and  
Athens, Georgia

1984

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## CHAPTER I

### The Promised Land

"I buy a book of one of those peddlers that are going over the mountain with tin-ware and brooms, and books and pamphlets, and one notion and another."<sup>1</sup>

In the preface to her fifth novel Catharine Maria Sedgwick wrote that she felt secure in "trusting to the indulgent disposition which our American public manifests toward native literature."<sup>2</sup> It was 1835 and Sedgwick was one of the nation's most celebrated writers. At that time she was recognized as a founder of the American literary tradition. Her international following had helped to put America on the cultural map. Redwood (1824), was a best seller in England and had been translated into German, Italian, Swedish, and French.<sup>3</sup> Sedgwick's latest offering proved to be as successful as she had anticipated: Linwoods, an historical novel in two volumes, was very well received. It would be reprinted by her New York publishers, Harper & Brothers, for the next half century.<sup>4</sup>

American writers were in great demand in the early years of the republic, for the United States was

without a native cultural tradition. Although political ties with Britain had been severed, most literature was still imported--Shakespeare, Milton, Richardson, Scott, the poems of Pope and Gray. Benjamin Franklin observed: "Those who loved reading were obliged to send for their books from England."<sup>5</sup> Franklin chose Pamela for his printing press, and thus it became the first novel in America.<sup>6</sup> Richardson was the most popular novelist in America until he was eclipsed by Scott. After the establishment of the United States, American readers found British books increasingly unsatisfactory. A separate national identity required a native cultural tradition. Some patriotic citizens rejected British books on principle. The need for a native literature was not motivated solely by nationalism, however. Books about life on the other side of the Atlantic often seemed irrelevant to a transplanted people who had faced the unknown and endured extraordinary hardships to build a nation on uncharted terrain. But the American experience had yet to be depicted in fiction.

There was a vast market for literature in the United States. E. Douglas Branch refers to Americans in the first half of the nineteenth century as "the most numerous reading public the world had yet known."<sup>7</sup> The Bible had provided most Americans with

their introduction to the written word, and innumerable school books had been printed since 1690 when Benjamin Harris' New England Primer taught them that "In Adam's fall we sinned all."<sup>8</sup> Since colonial times America had been a nation of people reading. Books and newspapers transmitted current events and European culture to Americans. Letters bridged the wilderness between settlements. And reading was a chief source of entertainment. In 1776 the editor of the New York Gazette and Mercury noted with pride:

Every lover of his country hath long observed with sacred pleasure the rapid progress of knowledge in this once howling wilderness, occasioned by the vast importation of books; the many public and private libraries in all parts of the country; the great taste<sup>9</sup> for reading which prevails in every rank.

Perhaps the best gauge of the literacy rate in the early years of the United States is the circulation of newspapers. Luther Mott reports that in 1800 there were eleven newspapers in New York alone.<sup>10</sup> (At present the city has two tabloids and The New York Times.) That important historical document, The Federalist Papers, is an anthology of newspaper articles by Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison, urging ratification of the Constitution. These articles present a careful exploration of the

issues, and they suggest a highly literate general public.

The literacy rate in America of the 1800's seems to have been higher than it was in Europe at the time. Benjamin Franklin wrote that

"reading became fashionable and our people, having no public amusements to divert their attention from study became better acquainted with books, and in a few years were observed by strangers to be better instructed and more intelligent than people in the same rank generally are in other countries."<sup>11</sup>

The predominantly working class and farming populations of Europe were often uneducated or without access to printed matter, whereas in America both men and women from all walks of life could read. Russel Nye writes that "as opposed to the British and European public, this was an educated audience . . . one that already had the reading habit. Reading in the United States was not restricted to the well educated, the wealthy, or even the upper classes."<sup>12</sup>

American fiction writers began to address this large reading public and began, in Catharine Sedgwick's words, "to add something to the scanty stock of American literature."<sup>13</sup> But most of the earlier American books were inferior imitations of British literary models. Sedgwick complained in her

journal that most American fiction lacked "the touch of the native artist--It is an oriental plant grown in a Northern land by an artificial process instead of the mighty energies of nature."<sup>14</sup> Mrs. Susanna Rowson was greatly indebted to Richardson for the contents of Charlotte Temple, a Tale of Truth (1791). As Mrs. Rowson was an Englishwoman residing in New York City, the first native American novel is generally considered to be William Hill Brown's The Power of Sympathy, written in in 1789, the year of Catharine Sedgwick's birth. The first American novelist to achieve distinction was Charles Brockden Brown. Although Brown was a skillful writer, his books, most notably Weiland (1798), follow the European Gothic tradition and are set in some mist-laden locale that cannot be readily identified as the United States. Among their number was Joel Barlow, who attempted an American epic, The Columbiad (1807), in which Columbus in his prison cell has visions of the future of America. The poem is eight books of painstaking iambic pentameter couplets, replete with alliterations, Miltonic echoes, and the names of George Washington's officers:

When the glad sea salutes their fainting  
sight,  
And Albion's fleet wide thundering aids  
their flight;  
They steer to sad New York their hasty way,  
And rue, the toils of Monmouth's mournful  
day.<sup>15</sup>

Vernon Louis Parrington writes that the "Connecticut Wits" had "embodied a conception of life and society that had taken form during nearly two hundred years of provincial experience; and they phrased that conception at the moment when vast changes were impending."<sup>16</sup>

In 1820 the British critic Sidney Smith dismissed all American literature with a shrug: "Who reads an American book?" Almost immediately, four Americans would write international best sellers. They were Washington Irving, William Cullen Bryant, James Fenimore Cooper, and a lady from Stockbridge, Massachusetts named Catharine Maria Sedgwick. Although their debt to British literature was apparent, their work was authentically American and had literary merit.

Washington Irving's clever advertisement in the New York papers of his Diedrich Knickerbocker's "distressing" disappearance<sup>17</sup> had launched a career which took flight in 1819 with The Sketchbook. By that time Irving was an expatriate and had become, according to Saxe Commins, "one of the three idols of the English reading public."<sup>18</sup> William Cullen Bryant became the first famous American poet in 1821 with the publication of his collected poems, and in that same year James Fenimore Cooper published The Spy.

Cooper's first novel, Precaution, was a pale imitation of the British novel of manners. In contrast, The Spy takes place in what can be identified as the American frontier. Catharine Sedgwick was as successful as Cooper. In fact, French critics thought Cooper was the author of Sedgwick's Redwood, custom having dictated that books by a woman be published anonymously. A letter to her brother Charles records Sedgwick's amusement at being confused with the author of "The Leatherstocking Tales":

By the way, I don't know whether you have yet been told that there is a notice--a sort of advertisement of Redwood (or rather Reedwood) in the Constitutionnel, a Paris newspaper. Harry was told last evening that there was a dispute in the Paris newspapers whether it was or was not written by Cooper--It is to be hoped that Mr. C's self-complacency will not be wounded by hearing this mortifying news.

Irving, Bryant, and Cooper chose distinctively American settings--the legends of New Amsterdam and the "Kaatskill" Mountains, indigenous flora and fauna, the mythical land beyond the Alleghenies. These writers do not clearly convey the harshness and intolerance of frontier society and the local governments. Sedgwick, unlike her contemporaries, rarely engaged in myth-making. She aimed to depict an America that her readers would recognize. She wrote

about the rural New England of her childhood and about New York City where she spent her winters. Her books became popular because she addressed the immediate concerns of her contemporaries: the liberal trend in organized religion, the alarming growth of the Shaker sect, gambling and dueling practices, the question of universal education, sectionalism in the United States. Sedgwick stated that it was her intention to "denote the passing character and manners of the present time and place."<sup>20</sup> Her fictional portrayal of the everyday lives of Americans anticipates late nineteenth-century realism. She describes in meticulous detail not only the scenery, but also the clothing, furnishings, topics of conversation, so that her era is depicted with almost photographic clarity.

Of the four writers, Catharine Sedgwick seems to come closest to achieving a personal writing style. The graceful simplicity of her language is pleasing to the modern ear and represents a departure from most writing of her day. Irving's measured, witty prose recalls Pope's traditional linguistic precepts, as set forth in his essay on criticism. Cooper's ornate sentences are distinctly Baroque. Bryant's metrics reveal his familiarity with the works of Wordsworth and Milton.

Other writers would denounce English literary conventions and sanction direct experience and free expression. Emerson and certain fellow-Transcendentalists, such as William Mayo Ellis, would exalt freedom of expression in complex scholarly prose, thus displaying the painstaking workmanship they so fervently disavowed. Catharine Sedgwick, on the other hand, readily acknowledged her linguistic inheritance. She adhered to many of the English novelistic conventions and included numerous references to English and classical literature. The extraordinary range of her knowledge enriches her popular fiction. She knew several languages and had toured Europe. She had studied the natural sciences and folklore, pondered questions about religion, economics, education, and human nature. In her Journal of Reminiscences she concurred with Gibbon who wrote that a love of reading was "worth all the rest of his education."<sup>21</sup> The artistic merit of Catharine Sedgwick's novels did not result from her rejection of British literary models, but from the strength of her prose and from the inclusion of distinctively American experiences in her fiction.

Although her books helped to initiate an American tradition in imaginative literature, they also mark the culmination of a long colonial tradition of

non-fiction writings. These were the works of "primarily utilitarian authors rather than literary artists," as Norman Foerster describes the first American writers.<sup>22</sup> The roots of Sedgwick's work are to be found in the religious and political writings of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The statements for religious toleration first articulated by Roger Williams and the Quaker, John Woolman, are recurring ideas in her novels as are the democratic ideals of Tom Paine, Thomas Jefferson, and Crèvecoeur. Sedgwick was well versed in the historical documents on America's past and drew upon them for both the factual and the philosophical elements of her novels. Like the non-fiction writing of the colonial years, her books are firmly grounded in practical concerns--how to improve the quality of life. She voiced the ethics of a nation built on hard work, sacrifice, and calculated risks. As a writer of romances she addressed a widespread notion that fiction was justified only if it served a practical purpose. In this she was at odds with Jefferson, whose political philosophy she admired. Jefferson had written that sentimental fiction "infects the mind, . . . destroys its tone and revolts it against wholesome reading. . . . The result is a bloated imagination, sickly judgements, and a disgust towards all the real businesses of

life."<sup>23</sup> The preface of Catharine Sedgwick's first edition of Redwood is, in essence, a defense of fiction. She wrote that "we cannot but indulge the hope that there will be found some who will derive amusement if not instruction from our humble efforts," and at least, "if they can do no good, they will do no harm."<sup>24</sup> While she defended the existence of the novel as entertainment she also expressed the conviction that writers were educators with a moral responsibility to their readers. Her goal was to "further human virtue and improvement."<sup>25</sup> On some level, all her novels are exempla.

Sedgwick's first novel, A New-England Tale (1822), was begun as a tract explicating her religious beliefs. Like a number of the Transcendentalists who were among her circle of friends, she had abandoned Calvinism for the Unitarian Church. The book is important today for the same reasons that it first achieved popularity, for its examination of religious practices in the United States, and for the local color that earned it recognition as an authentic American novel. From England Maria Edgeworth wrote of A New-England Tale that "It is to America what Scott's characters are to Scotland--valuable as original pictures."<sup>26</sup> With her novel about North and South, Redwood (1824), Sedgwick's international popularity

was assured. Bryant wrote in The North American Review that "we look upon the specimen before us as a conclusive argument that the writers of works of fiction, of which the scene is laid in familiar and domestic life, have a rich and varied field before them in the United States."<sup>27</sup> Redwood was followed by Hope Leslie (1827), an historical novel about the colonizing of Massachusetts during the Pequod Indian War. Hope Leslie became so popular that a generation later tourists were still visiting Laurel Hill, the setting of one of the book's dramatic scenes.<sup>28</sup> Both the novel and its famous author were commemorated in a poem by Lydia Howard Huntley Sigourney. Hope Leslie was followed by Clarence (1830), a sentimental novel about a young woman who leaves New York's fashionable society for a simpler life in the country, and The Linwoods (1835), an historical novel set during the War of Independence.

With these last two novels it was becoming apparent that the causes Sedgwick espoused were taking precedence over her interest in imaginative literature. For twenty years after Linwoods she would devote herself exclusively to sentimental didactic fiction. The products of this phase of her career heralded and perhaps paved the way for a major trend in American publishing: Most nineteenth-century

popular fiction would be written by and for women, so that, as Russel Nye reports, "no male writer of the mid-century approached the women authors in sales."<sup>29</sup> Catharine Sedgwick was the first of many popular women novelists but her didactic works, unlike the later so-called domestic fiction, were moralistic rather than sensationalistic. The narrative was designed to sugar-coat the author's message, rather than to be an end in itself. But Sedgwick did focus on home life and working class people, as would many of the later American women popular novelists. The subjects of Sedgwick's books, and her intended audience, were often laborers and domestics. She was certain that America was a land of opportunity where people from all walks of life could better themselves materially and spiritually. She was one of the first fiction writers to give voice to the American dream. She wrote:

Farmers and mechanics constitute the great mass of the American people. In the most highly civilized countries of Europe, there is a class more learned, more highly educated, and more accomplished than any in America; but no where, in this world, is there a working class which can sustain a comparison with ours for intelligence, virtue, prosperity, and<sup>30</sup> in short, for all the means of happiness.

In the 1830's she wrote an immensely popular didactic trilogy: Home, Live and Let Live, and The Poor Rich

Man and the Rich Poor Man. The latter was satirized by Herman Melville in "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs." The trilogy was followed by the sentimental story, The Boy of Mount Rhigi (1848), innumerable short stories, and a self-help handbook for young ladies entitled Means and Ends (1839). Catharine Sedgwick also published a collection of the letters she wrote during her tour of Europe (1841). Her last book was biography written in 1858 about Joseph Curtis, a teacher who devoted his life to New York slum dwellers.

Sedgwick's last work of fiction, Married or Single? (1857), describes an independent woman's search for her role in American society. All of her novels ended, as she said, "after some disposition to rebel" with "the most practical proof of our allegiance to the laws of romance, by making our hero and heroine man and wife." But she believed that every woman "has an independent power to shape her own course, and to forge her separate, independent way."<sup>31</sup> Her impressive career amply supports this contention.

This essay will focus on Sedgwick's major novels: A New-England Tale, Redwood, and Hope Leslie, which were praised by critics and the public alike. We will also look at her didactic best sellers and the social issues that inspired them. The unpublished journals

and letters, which are in the archives of the Massachusetts Historical Society, will be cited for their revelations about her ideas, her life, and her time.

Catharine Sedgwick was both a pioneer and a representative woman. The Massachusetts of her day was a center of literary activity, and the Sedgwick home became a gathering place for most of the important figures of the "American Renaissance"--Emerson, Channing, Melville, Hawthorne. Harriet Martineau and Matthew Arnold visited from England, William Gilmore Simms from Charleston, and Washington Irving from New York City.

In August of 1835, Sedgwick commented in her journal on the fame of Harriet Martineau, who had just completed a tour of the United States. She inadvertently provides an explanation for her own success: "No woman has ever perhaps rec'd so rich a recompense of reward & why?--I think because her spirit & influence have been in harmony with the spirit of the age--because she has gone with the current."<sup>32</sup> A popular author is often more representative of a time than a major author who transcends it. Sedgwick's time becomes accessible to us through her novels, with a clarity and immediacy that are not provided by history books, or even by the

works of her more famous literary contemporaries. For readers in the present day, Catharine Sedgwick's life and works provide a fine vantage point from which to view her era. Ideas that were central to her generation are filtered through her popular fiction. Her books are good indicators of popular taste, of shared values and aspirations; her contemporaries made best sellers of her novels and bought them for their children.

Always her subject is America. Catharine Sedgwick had faith in the democratic experiment, but she recognized that reality fell short of the ideal. She wrote, "There is something which more excites the imagination than even perfection itself, were that attainable on earth; and therefore we will ask, what country is, or has been, in any degree correspondent with our own?"<sup>33</sup> William Cullen Bryant praised Sedgwick's depiction of the United States: "We have seen the original, and require that there be no false coloring or distortion of the copy."<sup>34</sup> Another admirer of Sedgwick's work, Nathaniel Hawthorne, called her "our most truthful novelist."<sup>35</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick portrayed America the way it perceived itself.

Notes to Chapter I

<sup>1</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick, A New-England Tale (New York: E. Bliss and E. White, 1822), I, 43.

<sup>2</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick, The Linwoods (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1835), xii.

<sup>3</sup> Richard D. Birdsall, "W.C. Bryant and Catharine Sedgwick," New England Quarterly, Sept. 1968, p. 370.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Halsey Foster, Catharine Maria Sedgwick (New York: Twayne, 1974), p. 160, n.

<sup>5</sup> Benjamin Franklin, The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin (Reading, Pa.: Spencer, 1936), p. 97.

<sup>6</sup> Norman Foerster, ed. American Poetry and Prose (Cambridge, Ma.: Riverside), 1934, p. 116.

<sup>7</sup> Foerster, p. 276.

<sup>8</sup> Frank Luther Mott, American Journalism: Its History 1690-1960 (New York: MacMillan, 1962), p. 7.

<sup>9</sup> Mott, p. 108.

<sup>10</sup> Mott, p. 133.

<sup>11</sup> Franklin, p. 98.

<sup>12</sup> Russel Nye, The Unembarrassed Muse: The Popular Arts in America (New York: Dial, 1970), p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> Sedgwick, A New-England Tale, iii.

<sup>14</sup> Journal, 16 March 1835, MS. This and all other journals and letters are in the Catharine Maria Sedgwick Papers, The Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Ma.

<sup>15</sup> Joel Barlow, "The Columbiad," in The Connecticut Wits, ed. Vernon Louis Parrington (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1926), p. 294.

- 16 Parrington, ed., xi.
- 17 Susan Edmiston and Linda D. Cirino, Literary New York: A History and Guide (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), p. 13.
- 18 Saxe Commins, ed., Selected Writings of Washington Irving (New York: Random House, 1945), xii.
- 19 Letter to Charles Sedgwick, N.Y., Saturday, 27 Feb. 1825, ALS.
- 20 Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Redwood (New York: E. Bliss and E. White, 1824), ix.
- 21 "Journal of Reminiscences," 1853, MS.
- 22 Foerster, p. 115.
- 23 Foerster, p. 116.
- 24 Redwood, ix.
- 25 A New-England Tale, iii.
- 26 Seth Curtis Beach, Daughters of the Puritans (1905; rpt. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1905), p. 30.
- 27 William Cullen Bryant, "Review of Redwood," North American Review, Apr. 1825, p. 248.
- 28 Foster, p. 89.
- 29 Nye, p. 29.
- 30 Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Means and Ends (Boston: Marsh, Capen, Lyon, & Webb, 1839), p. 101.
- 31 Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Married or Single? (New York: Harpers, 1857), vi.
- 32 Journal, Sunday, 9 Aug. 1835, MS.
- 33 Redwood, xi.
- 34 Bryant, p. 246.
- 35 Foster, p. 20.

## CHAPTER II

### Beginnings

"We shall not," she said, "be at your aunt's in time for breakfast; here: tie on your hat. You will need all your strength and courage, and you must not waste any on flowers and birds."

--p. 29, Vol. I,  
A New-England Tale.

Catharine Maria Sedgwick, one of the first American novelists, was born on December 28, 1789. On the other side of the Atlantic 1789 marked the fall of the Bastille and the start of the French Revolution. In the United States the War of Independence was a recent memory. George Washington had begun his first term of office as president in April of that year.

The rural Stockbridge of Catharine Sedgwick's birth was not far removed from wilderness. The Allegheny Mountains were the boundaries of the Western frontier. Sedgwick would write that in the Berkshire hills of her childhood "the dark shadows of the Indians had hardly passed off our valleys--and tales about them made the stock terrors of our day."<sup>1</sup> In her "Journal of Reminiscences" she recounts a story

that illustrates an important element of colonial life, the ever-present threat of Indian raids:

The Indians of New England were at that time--about 1750--friendly to the white people, but the Mohawks were a terror to the whites & to their red friends. . . . The servant men only were at home--a black man & Lynch--the Irish servant. . . . There was an alarm--the cry "The Indians are coming!" There were no horses in the stable--& the women decided at once to set out on foot. My grandmother gave her little girl Pamela (my mother) to the black servant & dispatched him. Lynch followed soon after & descending the hill heard a faint cry from a thick copse by the road side--The cry came from the poor little girl whom the terrified man had relieved himself of as soon as out of sight--Lynch took her up & hurried her to a place of safety--The Indians did not come but Lynch ever after looked upon himself as the hero in our family annals--in truth, pretty much as its founder.<sup>2</sup>

At the Sedgwick family's dinner table, momentous events of the Federalist period were often the subject of conversation. Catharine Sedgwick's father, Theodore, was a Congressman and a close associate of Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and President Washington. George Washington, who literally towered over his contemporaries, could count Theodore Sedgwick among the many who greatly revered him. Catharine Sedgwick conveys the awe with which Washington was regarded in her description of a meeting between the president and her father:

When my father was first elected to Congress, which was not till after a very sharp contest, he had a very slight acquaintance with Washington--The first evening he arrived at the seat of government he went with a friend to be presented at the President's Levee--The President immediately recognized him, stepped out of the drawing room, gave his hand to my Father, and told him he was very glad that he was elected at last--

This was a most gracious reception from a man characterised by a deportment reserved almost to a severity--To my father who knew how to appreciate even a look from the greatest man of any age or country, it was a mark of distinction and kindness peculiarly graceful.<sup>3</sup>

Years later Sedgwick would write a historical novel, Linwoods (1833), which included George Washington as a character. She portrays him as a heroic figure, much as he is viewed to this day. Her descriptions are thorough and self-conscious, and compel the reader to trust her as chronicler. She wrote in the preface of Linwoods:

A very few of our "immortal names" have been introduced, with what propriety the reader must determine. It may be permitted to say, in extenuation of what may seem presumption, that whenever the writer has mentioned Washington, she has felt a sentiment resembling the awe of the pious Isrealite when he approached the ark of the Lord."<sup>4</sup>

Theodore Sedgwick was a distinguished personage in his own right. He had fought in Washington's army, and when the war ended he worked as a member of the

Continental Congress to ratify the Constitution. He would serve as a senator and as Speaker of the House of Representatives and he became the leader of the powerful Massachusetts legislators called "The Mountain Gods." His wife's family, the Dwights and the Williamses, were known as "The River Gods" because they lived near the Connecticut River and because they were among the wealthiest and most socially prominent families in colonial America.<sup>5</sup> Sedgwick, on the other hand, was a self-made man. Richard E. Welch writes that Catharine Sedgwick "took pride in the fact that her father, if of more modest ancestry, had clearly outdistanced his wife's relations."<sup>6</sup> Her father's success may have been the source of Catharine Sedgwick's belief that the American dream is viable, a belief that is central to her fiction.

Theodore Sedgwick was descended from poor farmers. The profits from his brother John's tavern enabled him to attend Yale, but he was expelled for excessive party-going. His first law office in Great Barrington was later to be occupied by William Cullen Bryant. His daughter writes that "for six weeks he sat looking up and down the street . . . for a client but no client came--& he took down his sign--moved off to Sheffield--where he began his honorable legal career."<sup>7</sup>

Pamela Dwight's parents objected to her marriage to Sedgwick because of the disparity of their origins and because he was a widower of only a few months. They nevertheless were married a year and a day after the first Mrs. Sedgwick, Eliza Mason, had died of smallpox. The oldest daughter was named Eliza Mason, "at my mother's request," writes Sedgwick, "a proof how generous and unjealous she was."<sup>8</sup> This gesture was not unprecedented; Sedgwick's contemporary, the once popular poet Lydia Howard Huntley Sigourney, was the namesake of her father's first wife.<sup>9</sup> Of her mother Catharine Sedgwick writes: "Through a whole life-time she never once expressed a feeling of impatience."<sup>10</sup> Pamela Sedgwick protested ineffectually against her husband's pursuit of a career in public life. A letter records her attempt to dissuade him from his political aspirations:

"Pardon me, my dearest Mr. Sedgwick, if I beg you once more to think over the matter before you embark in public business. I grant that the "call of our country," "the voice of fame," and the "Honorable" and "Right Honorable" are high sounding words. "They play around the head, but they come not near the heart."<sup>11</sup>

Catharine Sedgwick argues that her father must have felt an overwhelming sense of duty to his country or he never would have stayed away all the winters of her

childhood," at every private sacrifice--at the expense of his domestic happiness, his home-love, which was his ruling passion."<sup>12</sup> She attributes her mother's frequent illnesses and chronic depression to "the delicate construction of a sensitive and reserved temperament, a constitution originally fragile, and roughly handled by medical treatment of the times, and the terrible weight of domestic cares."<sup>13</sup> She writes in her journal: "How well do I remember her tenderness when all else was gone."<sup>14</sup>

Catharine Maria was the ninth of ten children, seven of whom survived infancy. She was told that the weather had been unusually cold on the day she was born, two months prematurely, and that an older brother had thought her as "fair and handsome as a London doll."<sup>15</sup> She would remember her childhood in the Massachusetts countryside as

"a most happy one.--I enjoyed unrestrained the pleasures of a rural childhood--I want with herds of schoolgirls nutting and berrying--& bathing by moonlight & wading by daylight--in the lovely Housatonic that flows thro' my father's meadows. I saw its beauty then--I loved it as a playfellow . . . early studied & early learned its picture language, so rich & universal."<sup>16</sup>

As their mother was frequently bedridden, the Sedgwick children were entrusted to a black woman named Elizabeth Freeman, a former slave of Colonial

John Ashley. When her arm was broken by Mrs. Ashley wielding a hot fire shovel, Elizabeth Freeman had sought protection from Sedgwick. Although Ashley was a cousin and a close friend, as well as a man of considerable political power, Sedgwick had the slave freed in a famous case that raised the question of the legality of slavery in Massachusetts.<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Freeman subsequently asked to be employed by the Sedgwicks, and she remained with them for the rest of her life. She virtually raised the Sedgwick children, to whom she was known as "Mumbet." Catharine Sedgwick would write that her earliest recollection was of "my love of Mumbet,--that noble woman."<sup>18</sup>

Edward Halsey Foster, in his well-researched book on Catharine Sedgwick, reports that Theodore Sedgwick participated in other legal battles to free slaves, yet he viewed Abolition as unworkable. He sponsored the Fugitive Slave Law of 1791 because he believed it would protect Southern and national interests. Foster also states that Judge Sedgwick, like his friend Alexander Hamilton, had little faith in the common man, whom he once described as a "greasy, unwashed multitude."<sup>19</sup>

Although every one of the Sedgwick children became staunch democrats, their relationship with their father remained amicable. Catharine would devote her

later years to furthering universal education and to improving conditions for immigrants, indigent women, and prisoners. She objected to slavery on moral grounds, although she did not ally herself with Abolitionists. Her brothers Theodore and Henry were attorneys who played an active role in social legislation. Robert was a founder of the liberal Unitarian Church in New York. Elizabeth married an influential Massachusetts lawyer, Thaddeus Pomeroy. Frances married the New York publisher, Ebenezer Watson. Charles, the youngest, married Elizabeth Buckminster Dwight, wrote children's books and founded the Lenox Girls' School. Theodore's wife, Anne Livingston Ridley, was also a fiction writer. Catharine was the only one of the seven children who did not marry. She stayed at her brothers' homes. Throughout their lives all the brothers and sisters would remain devoted to each other and would exchange lengthy, affectionate letters between frequent visits.

Foster states that one of the aims of his study of Sedgwick is to emphasize her brothers' contribution to her career. "Few records survive to tell us exactly how much they helped her," he writes, "but, if her statements are to be believed, her debt to them was enormous." He refers to their help in negotiating with publishers and claims that her political views

were "borrowed directly from her brothers, all of whom were Jacksonian Democrats. She herself knew little of politics and economics; what she did know of these subjects she learned from her brothers and from their books such as Theodore's Public and Private Economy." Yet Foster himself points out that Theodore's Hints to My Countrymen (1826), a paean to the common man, shows the direct influence of his sister's book Redwood (1824).<sup>20</sup> Sedgwick's letters and journals are filled with references to her love for her brothers. She lived in their homes, and accepted their assistance in matters of business, but she made judgments carefully and she had a mind of her own. She differed with her brothers on a number of issues, including Abolition, and when she rejected her father's political views she did not lose sight of his integrity and dedication to public service. "The good done by my father," she wrote, "in contriving to establish the government & to swell the current of political virtue makes the history of the Federal party the record of the purest patriotism the world has known that remains."<sup>21</sup>

Theodore Sedgwick's sons and daughters were raised in "an atmosphere of high intelligence. My father had uncommon mental vigor. So had my brothers. Their daily habits, and pursuits, and pleasures were intellectual, and I naturally imbibed from them a

kindred taste." She adds that "There was much choice seed dropped in the fresh furrow & some of it, I may say, fell on good ground." It was Judge Sedgwick's custom to read to Catharine from Hume, Shakespeare, Cervantes, and Butler."<sup>22</sup> And his daughter considered her love of reading to be more valuable than her formal education. Theodore Sedgwick also insisted that this children learn how to maintain the house and farm even though there were servants to do the work. Many years later Sedgwick would comment, "It is worth a great deal more to know how to sweep, than how to dance."<sup>23</sup>

"Education in the common sense, I had next to none," is Sedgwick's assessment of her formal schooling. She attended the village schools where "our minds were not weakened by too much study." From the first she wanted to be popular and successful: "I remember feeling an intense ambition to be at the head of my class & generally being there."<sup>24</sup> She wished for the approval of her classmates and had the means to achieve it; she used to hand out treats, such as raisins and nuts, which until detected, she charged to her father's account at the store.<sup>25</sup>

At thirteen she was sent to Miss Bell's school in Albany, but Miss Bell "rose late, was half the time out of the school, and did very little when in it." At fifteen she went to Mrs. Payne's finishing school

in Boston, which broadened her social horizons, if not her scholarship. She recalled,

I was at the most susceptible age. My father's numerous friends in Boston opened their doors to me. I was attractive in my appearance, and from always associating on equal terms with those much older than myself, I had a mental maturity rather striking, and with an ignorance of the world, a romantic enthusiasm, an aptitude at admiring and loving that altogether made me an object of general interest. I was admired and flattered. . . . When I came home from Boston I felt the deepest mortification at my waste of time and money, though my father never said one word to me on the subject.<sup>26</sup>

In 1807, two years after Catharine Sedgwick returned from Boston, her mother died. A year later her father remarried again. His new wife was a socially prominent Bostonian named Penelope Russell. "It was disastrous," wrote Catharine. "She fluttered gracefully enough through the inanities of town drawing rooms--but the realities & simplicity of our country life were insupportable to her."<sup>27</sup> Unlike the heroine of her novel, Clarence, who chooses the country over the city, Catharine left home to stay with Robert's family in New York, returning only for summertime visits.

Theodore Sedgwick died in 1813. When he was near death he confided his liberal religious leanings to Catharine and to his close friend, the Transcenden-

talist and Unitarian minister, William Ellery Channing. For Catharine Sedgwick this was the culmination of her struggle against the Calvinism of her native Stockbridge, embodied in "dear old Dr. West--our sixty years defender of the Puritan faith,"<sup>28</sup> who she had "dreaded" and had seen as a "sapless embodiment of polemical divinity."<sup>29</sup> Sedgwick wrote to her brother Robert in New York:

Our dear Father told me with tears of anguish that he felt the deepest sorrow that he had so long delayed this duty--that he had soothed his conscience with frivolous excuses--Thank God our parent's life is full of patterns for us, but if his failure in any instance warns us, let us not fear to profit by it, as he, having now as we hope and believe entered into the joy and rest of his Lord, would desire we should do.<sup>30</sup>

(Sunday evening, March 22,  
1818, to Robert Sedgwick)

The first Unitarian church in New York City was built on Pearl Street in 1819. Henry Sedgwick was one of the founders and Channing, Bryant, Melville, and Catharine Sedgwick were members of the congregation.<sup>31</sup> Good works and religious toleration were emphasized by Unitarians, and the concepts of Predestination and Original Sin were often questioned. The creed's premise that man is innately good would be the cornerstone of Sedgwick's fiction.

In 1821 Sedgwick began to write a tract in narrative form with the aim of conveying her religious beliefs. The project grew into a novel entitled A New-England Tale; or, Sketches of New-England Character and Manners, with a setting that closely resembled Stockbridge. Her publisher was the New York firm of E. Bliss and E. White of 128 Broadway. Although Sedgwick referred to the book as "that humble production,"<sup>32</sup> her family was delighted. "I have read 130 pages," Theodore wrote from Massachusetts. "It exceeds my expectations, fond and flattering as they were."<sup>33</sup> The public was equally enthusiastic and the book soon became a best seller. The controversial subject matter, religious liberalism, may have increased the book's popular appeal, but it also cost her friends in her conservative Calvinist Berkshire community. When Sedgwick visited Stockbridge that summer she found that many of the townspeople kept their distance. She wrote to Mrs. Channing:

I could not endure the idea that I had written myself out of the affections of my own people. Here is the home of my heart, and though there is undoubtedly some transient dissatisfaction, my friends here love me better than those who have not been bred up with me can. They think, as they express themselves, that I am in a dreadful error, but I believe that they would for the most part concur in an expression I heard reported from the good little wife of our

parson, 'I hope you do not love her the less for it.'<sup>34</sup>

(Stockbridge, August 17,  
1822, p. 157, Life)

Mary Dewey includes the following footnote in Life and Letters of Catharine Maria Sedgwick (1871):

An excellent aunt of Miss Sedgwick, who was very fond of her, said to her one day, as they were parting, after Miss Sedgwick had become an avowed Unitarian, "Come and see me as often as you can, dear, for you know, after this world, we shall never meet again."<sup>35</sup>

With the publication of her second novel, Redwood, Sedgwick would become an international celebrity and most of the citizens of Stockbridge would forgive her. For the rest of her life she would spend summers with her relatives in Stockbridge or nearby Lenox. In her third and most famous novel, Hope Leslie, she would write, "Home can never be transferred; never repeated in the experience of an individual. The place consecrated by parental love, by the innocence and sports of childhood, by the first acquaintance with nature; by the linking of the heart to the visible creation, is the only home."<sup>36</sup> Her own horizons would stretch far beyond the limits of her native village and beyond the Berkshire hills that she chose as a backdrop for much of her fiction. But she asked her brother Robert whether he had "entirely put

away the childish feeling of homesickness," and  
confided to him that

I fell into what in your College days you  
used to call a reverie, just at sunset this  
evening. . . . For a moment I thought I was  
at Stockbridge, and when I fairly opened my  
eyes and saw the beautiful new moon shining  
on these brick houses, I could have cried  
because I could not see her silver beams  
playing on our own little stream, and  
shining thro' the naked branches of dear  
Charles' trees--I sometimes think my love  
for that spot is, for these philosophic  
enlightened times too much like that of the  
savage who thinks his Heaven is to be one  
great hunting ground--There I have located  
my heaven.<sup>37</sup>

(to Robert Sedgwick, Albany,  
21 Nov. 1819 to NY)

Notes to Chapter II

<sup>1</sup> "Journal of Reminiscences," p. 19, 5 May 1853, MS. This and all other journals and letters are in the Catharine Maria Sedgwick Papers, The Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Ma.

<sup>2</sup> "Journal of Reminiscences," pp. 19-20, MS.

<sup>3</sup> Journal, 12 July 1812, MS.

<sup>4</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick, The Linwoods (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1835), xii.

<sup>5</sup> Edward Halsey Foster, Catharine Maria Sedgwick (New York: Twayne, 1974), p. 25.

<sup>6</sup> Richard E. Welch, Jr., "Sedgwick, Catharine Maria," Notable American Women, 1607-1950: A Biographical Dictionary, 1971.

<sup>7</sup> "Journal of Reminiscences," p. 33, MS.

<sup>8</sup> "Journal of Reminiscences," p. 38, MS.

<sup>9</sup> Jane Benardete, "Sigourney, Lydia Howard (Huntley)," American Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide, 1982.

<sup>10</sup> "Journal of Reminiscences," p. 61, MS.

<sup>11</sup> Pamela Dwight Sedgwick, as quoted in Seth Curtis Beach, Daughters of the Puritans (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1905), p. 31.

<sup>12</sup> "Journal of Reminiscences," p. 57, MS.

<sup>13</sup> Mary E. Dewey, ed. Life and Letters of C.M. Sedgwick (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1871), p. 29.

<sup>14</sup> Journal, Sunday Morning, 27 August 1837, MS.

<sup>15</sup> "Journal of Reminiscences," p. 66, MS.

<sup>16</sup> "Journal of Reminiscences," p. 83, MS.

<sup>17</sup> Foster, p. 30.

- 18 "Journal of Reminiscences," p. 70, MS.
- 19 Foster, pp. 29-30, p. 28.
- 20 Foster, ix, p. 34; p. 70.
- 21 "Journal of Reminiscences," p. 53.
- 22 "Journal of Reminiscences," p. 47; p. 80; p.  
66.
- 23 Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Home (Boston: J.  
Munroe, 1835), p. 109.
- 24 "Journal of Reminiscences," p. 81.
- 25 "Journal of Reminiscences," p. 88.
- 26 C.M. Sedgwick, as quoted by Beach, pp. 14-15.
- 27 "Journal of Reminiscences," p. 64.
- 28 "Journal of Reminiscences," p. 23, MS.
- 29 Life and Letters, p. 60.
- 30 Letter to Robert Sedgwick, Sunday evening, 22  
March 1818, ALS.
- 31 Walter Donald Kring, Liberals among the  
Orthodox (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), p. 42.

### Chapter III

#### A Song and a Sermon

"The clergyman of \_\_\_\_\_ was one of those, who are more zealous for sound doctrine, than benevolent practice; he had chosen that occasion for his text, "the wages of sin is death," and had preached a long sermon in the vain endeavor of elucidating the doctrine of original sin."

. . .

"I am used," replied Jane, "to be without a companion, and I do not need one."

"But, I hope you do not object to one? It would be one of the miseries of human life to see such a girl as Jane Elton walking alone, and not be permitted to join her."

"Sir?" said Jane, confounded by Edward's unexpected gallantry.

Catharine Sedgwick's first novel was entitled A New-England Tale; or, Sketches of New-England Character and Manners. It was published anonymously in 1822. On the title page Sedgwick quotes from Robert Burns:

But how the subject theme may gang;  
Let time and chance determine;  
Perhaps it may turn out a sang,  
Perhaps turn out a sermon (i).

The verse is a fitting preface to a writing career in which art would often give way to didacticism. The quotation also indicates the experimental nature of A New-England Tale and implies the author's duality of intention: The book was an explication of Sedgwick's thoughts on religion, as well as her deliberate attempt to create America's first authentic novel.

Sedgwick acknowledged that the book was "not sufficiently premeditated." She explained: "The original design of the author was . . . simply to produce a short and simple moral tale of the most humble description" (iii). To be precise, Sedgwick's original plan was to write a tract. Shortly after she joined the Unitarian Church in 1821, she began to enumerate on paper the teachings of the church. According to Seth Curtis Beach, in Daughters of the Puritans, Sedgwick was provoked into writing the tract by her Stockbridge relatives' vehement disapproval of her conversion.<sup>3</sup> The project soon began to encompass subjects other than religion and it evolved into a literary portrait of New England life. Sedgwick decided to approach the novel form in what she called her "humble attempt to add something to the scanty stock of American literature" (iii). She set out to accomplish this by including abundant local color and characters who spoke in regional dialects. The focus

shifted away from religion, but the book retained a persistent didactic strain that would become Sedgwick's hallmark.

A New-England Tale concerns the trials and tribulations of an orphan girl growing up in an unnamed New England village. The moral convictions of the author are woven into the fabric of the plot with neat but sometimes oversized stitches.

Jane Elton's parent have died and bequeathed their financial ruin to their twelve-year-old daughter. Jane is armed only with manners, education, and character--the three attributes the author most valued, and which she would name in later writings as the only necessary qualities for social advancement in a democratic United States.

Jane's fate is decided at her mother's funeral, when her three aunts, the archetypal three sisters of mythology, fairy tales, and drama, all attempt to extricate themselves from responsibility toward their niece. But the youngest sister, Mrs. Wilson, wishing to appear the best Christian of the three, hastily agrees to adopt Jane.

Creditors dispose of Jane's property. The house is sold to a young Quaker gentleman named Mr. Lloyd, who wise, pious, and a widower. Mr. Lloyd's introduction early in the novel paves the way for

Jane's marriage to him when she grows up, six years and two hundred pages later. But first Jane must go on a quest, without embarking on a journey. She must maintain her faith and integrity in the trying environment of her aunt's home. Jane's confidante and former servant, Mary Hull, tells her:

Dear Jane, try to be happy. This foolish aunt of yours will try you like fire, but I look to see you come out of it as gold from the furnace: keep up a good heart, my child, it is a long lane that never turns (p. 54).

This admonition is later repeated, with different imagery, by Mr. Lloyd:

My dear young friend, thou hast wisely and safely guided thy little bark thus far down the stream of life; be still vigilant and prudent and thou wilt glide unharmed through the dangers that alarm thee (p. 121).

But the local madwoman, Crazy Bet, has a different perspective. She says that Jane's innocence is "God's seal in the forehead to keep you from all harm" (p. 136).

Jane's testing ground is the household of her aunt, Mrs. Wilson, who attends daily prayer meetings but is nevertheless unchristian in her dealings with others. Mrs. Wilson denies her children all the "appropriate pleasures of childhood," including dancing and romantic novels. She also discourages her

children from communicating with her. The second daughter, Elvira, tells Jane, "Disguises are the only wear in our camp" (p. 58). Jane becomes the unpaid servant and scapegoat. She is blamed for everything that goes wrong in the Wilson household, and everything does go wrong. Mrs. Wilson's negative influence on her children becomes increasingly apparent. Elvira steals out at night to go dancing and meet men. David accumulates gambling debts and chooses dissolute companions while away at college, presumably Harvard. We learn the fate of Martha in parenthetical fashion comparable to Virginia Woolf's revelation of Mrs. Ramsay's death in To the Lighthouse. Martha has died, after having run away with a tavern keeper, abused her children, and become an acute alcoholic. Jane, on the other hand, continues to be modest and virtuous and a model student. She visits the poor and sits up with the dying. She is called to the bedside of a girl named Mary Oakley, because, as Mountain John tells her, "every body in the village knew you for the wisest, and discreetest, and gentlest" (p. 149). Mary had been found wandering in the woods and has given birth to a stillborn child, fathered by David Wilson. She has lost the will to live, and even Jane's best efforts cannot save her life.

On her return from Mary Oakley's deathbed, Jane surprises David Wilson rifling his mother's purse. He has been implicated in a bank robbery and needs the money to pay the extortion fees demanded by his cohorts. When Jane is falsely accused of stealing the money, she finally walks out of the Wilson house forever.

In later novels Sedgwick will examine more closely the plight of impoverished single women without caring relatives. But in A New-England Tale the heroine is rescued by Edward Erskine, who proposes marriage. Erskine is a charming and amoral law student who had courted both Jane and her cousin Elvira for some time, in a rather desultory fashion. Distraught and grateful, Jane convinces herself that she loves Erskine. Mr. Lloyd, not yet aware of his own love for Jane, thinks that she will have enough sense to refuse Erskine, "but he did not allow for the inexperience of youth, for the liability of a young lady of seventeen to fall in love; for the faith that hopes all things and believes all things--it wishes to believe" (p. 122).

Jane is appalled when she discovers that Erskine gambles, fights duels, and is an unscrupulous lawyer. When he reveals that he does not believe in God, Jane breaks off their engagement. Erskine cries when they

part, because he knows how much he has lost, but he soon recovers sufficiently to remark that every lithographic of Justice holding the scales wears the supercilious expression of Jane Elton.

Jane becomes a school teacher. Elvira Wilson elopes with "an itinerant French dancing master" and they cross the Massachusetts border into New York, where they can find someone who will marry them without asking questions. "Dey say," said Lavoisier, "l'amour fait passer le temps, but in l'Amerique it is very differente" (p. 240-41). David Wilson is caught robbing a mail stage, a crime which carries the penalty of death. His mother does not attempt to get him a lawyer, although Jane begs Mrs. Wilson not to abandon her son. Erskine, an expert lawyer, gets David pardoned and David returns home to curse his mother.

The novel's denouement becomes an absurdity. Mountain John's son returns home from the sea, having eluded his captors, the "Algerines." He is Mary Hull's sweetheart, and he delights her by revealing that he is now a Methodist, having been converted by a missionary from Calcutta.

Sedgwick draws a veil over Lloyd's proposal to Jane, except to write that "the result of the interview was perfectly satisfactory to both parties"

(p. 262). Jane has conveniently decided to accept her husband's Quaker faith. The author hastens to add that the couple "gave to the spirit over the letter, to the practice over the profession" (p. 269). Thus they serve as paradigms for Sedgwick's definition of true Christians.

A New England Tale contains subject matter that Sedgwick's contemporaries found to be both timely and sensationalistic. These elements did the sales no harm. There were also references to gambling parlors and girls gone wrong. The most controversial element by far was the novel's reputed anti-Calvinist stance. Foster points out that Sedgwick found it necessary to add a rebuttal to the preface of her second edition, stating that "the objections which have been made to the moral and religious character of this book, the writer cannot comprehend. . . . Religious cant and sanctimonious pretence have existed in most ages of the world, and have ever been deemed legitimate objects of satire."<sup>4</sup>

Sedgwick was the first to articulate the tenets of Unitarianism in fiction, but religious liberalism was gaining strength in the 1820s. In small villages similar to the one she depicts in her novel, Calvinism was still the only accepted religion. In her own birthplace of Stockbridge, the Puritan minister, the

Reverend West, was the unchallenged religious leader. She referred to him as "our sixty years defender of the Puritan faith."<sup>5</sup> But other religions were firmly established, particularly in the larger cities. In New York, where Catharine Sedgwick spent her winters, the Dutch Reformed, Episcopal, and Presbyterian churches predominated. The Unitarian Church was established in 1819, with Henry Sedgwick as one of its founders.<sup>6</sup> Catharine would join two years later. Other members would include Melville, Bryant, and Channing. Perry Miller observes that most of the Transcendentalists, whose thought so characterized the age, were "born into the Unitarianism of New England in the early 19th century." In Miller's definition, the Transcendentalists "became excited, or rather intoxicated, by the new literature of England and of the Continent (and also by a cursory introduction to that of the Orient), and who thereupon revolted against the rationalism of their fathers." But Miller stresses that the Transcendentalists "owed much to the liberalism of the creed they outgrew."<sup>7</sup> Unitarians question the concepts of Original Sin, salvation by Grace or through "awakenings," and the sect continues to be viewed as radical, even unethical by orthodox Christians. Dr. Walter Donald Kring, Minister Emeritus of the Unitarian Church in NYC

describes the connection between the Transcendentalists and the Unitarians:

In New England, with the rise of the Unitarian emphasis on freedom in reaction to Trinitarian dogmatism . . . personal search and discovery for mystical communion directly with God, as opposed to the mediation of Christ, became the foundation of New England Transcendentalism.

Catharine Sedgwick did not delve deeply into Unitarian theology, but the ideas that form the basis of A New-England Tale are a central part of the most significant philosophical and literary movement of her era. In The Feminization of American Culture Ann Douglas suggests that Sedgwick influenced the work of Harvard Divinity School's first Unitarian professor, Henry Ware, Jr. Ware authored a widely read tract entitled On the Formation of Christian Character (1831) which, according to Douglas,

forms the apothesis of his pastoral mission, an exact theological rationale and description for the behavior of the heroine of sentimental literature. Jane Elton, the heroine of Catharine Maria Sedgwick's first novel, A New England Tale (1822), written to defend and advertise the Unitarian creed, is an anticipation of Ware's thinking.

The essence of Miss Sedgwick's belief is conveyed in what should be considered the central episode of A New-England Tale, the death of Mary Oakley. It is

after this experience that the heroine, Jane Elton, achieves spiritual insight and attains sufficient maturity to declare her independence from Mrs. Wilson. It is also the occasion on which Sedgwick's religious views are stated, through the folk wisdom of her spokesman Mountain John.

After the girl has died, Jane asks Mountain John whether she had repented of her sins.

John shook his head. "Them things did not seem to lay on her mind; and I did not thin' it worth while to disturb her about them. Ah, Miss, the great thinking is how we live, not how we die."

"Surely, said she, "it is never to late to repent--to beg forgiveness."

"No, Miss;" replied John, who seemed to have religious notions of his own--. . . "but the work must be all between the creature and the Creator, and for my part, I don't place much dependence on what people say on a death-bed. I have lived a long life, Miss Jane, and many a one have I seen, an heard too, when sickness and distress were heavy on them, death staring in the face, and they could not sin any more--they would seem to repent and talk as beautiful as any saint; but if the Lord took his hand from them, and they got well again, they went right back into the old track. No, Miss Jane, it is the life--it is the life we must look to" (p. 151).

Christianity to Sedgwick was not only the observance of Church ritual, but also its application to everyday life. With her conversion to the Unitarian faith she embraced a belief in the progress of humanity through selflessness and the application

of the Golden Rule. In A New England Tale the moral issue she addresses are larger than her own personal quarrel with certain Calvinist doctrines. Sedgwick examines the possible consequences of hypocrisy and false piety upon society and the individual.

In A New-England Tale the author's paradigm of false piety is Mrs. Wilson. Jane "had often occasion secretly to lament that while there was so much of the form of worship, there was so little of its spirit and truth. . . . Mrs. Wilson was fond of the bold and highly figurative language of the prophets; and often identified herself with the Psalmist, in his exultation over his enemies, in his denunciations, and in his appeals for vengeance" (pp. 158-59). Catharine Sedgwick voices her skepticism of religious "awakenings" by describing Mrs. Wilson's experience:

Mrs. Wilson had fancied herself one of the subjects of an awakening at an early period of her life; and passed through the ordeal of a church examination with great credit, having depicted in glowing colours the opposition of her natural heart to the decrees and her subsequent joy in the doctrine of election. She thus assumed the form of godliness, without feeling its power" (p. 31).

Mrs. Wilson also serves to illustrate Sedgwick's theory that parents are responsible for their their children's failings. Mrs. Wilson encourages hypocrisy

in the home and discourages communication. She adheres to religious practices only for the sake of appearances, and only when it is convenient. All her children turn out badly. When her son David is condemned to death, Mrs. Wilson says she will meekly accept God's will, and she refuses to send him bail money. She tells Jane, who is trying to intercede for David that

The kingdom of grace is very different for the kingdom of nature. . . . The natural man can do nothing toward his own salvation. . . . You, Jane, are as much a child of wrath, and so is every son and daughter of Adam . . . --all totally depraved--totally corrupt. You may have been under more restraint, and not acted out your sins; but no thanks to you. . . . The saints of old--David, and Samuel, and Eli, were afflicted as I am, with rebellious children" (pp. 245-46).

The religious notions of Mrs. Wilson juxtaposed against those of Jane and Mr. Lloyd. The most outstanding quality of the heroine and hero is their unselfishness, or what Sedgwick calls their "disinterestedness." Erskine is skeptical of selflessness, saying that "It only exists in the vision of poets, or the Utopian dreams of youth; or perhaps embodied in the fair person of a hero of romance." But Jane protests, "Oh! my dear Edward, it does exist; it is the principle, the spirit of the Christians!" (p.

189). We are told that "Mr. Lloyd was really a disinterested man. . . . He could weave the happiness of others even though no thread of his own was in the fabric" (p. 176). Lloyd performs almost magical feats to right wrongs. He also resigns himself to losing Jane to Erskine if that would make her happy. The idea of self-sacrifice for love's sake would be developed in Sedgwick's third novel, Hope Leslie. Jane is more passive than Lloyd, but she too has "a rare habit of putting self aside; of deferring her own inclinations to the will, and inclinations of others" (p. 182). She endures the persecution of the Wilsons, and she refuses to become embittered toward them.

Edward Foster calls Jane Elton "Miss Sedgwick's illustration of the ideal Christian woman." He faults Catharine Sedgwick for creating a heroine who he sees as "colorless precisely because she never acts decisively and meekly endures the false accusations of her enemies. It is clear that no Jane Elton will ever rid the world of evil; Jane simply maintains her Christian outlook on life, never despairs, nurses the sick, and helps the downtrodden. In other words, she is the embodiment of faith, hope, and charity."<sup>10</sup> Foster comments that "It is left for men such as Mr. Lloyd to combat actively the evil in the world and insure a happy ending for women like Jane."<sup>11</sup> But

Sedgwick's heroine must be viewed in the context of women's role in the 1820's. Jane is an accurate reflection of her society when she says, "It is my duty to subdue, not rouse my spirit" (p. 117). It was a time when women were seldom either powerful or autonomous, when marriage was a virtual necessity. The marriage at the end of the novel was as much a practical solution as it was a literary convention. Sedgwick was herself unable to maintain her own household, despite the fact that she was writer of international best sellers. She revealed in her journals that she regretted the necessity of her dependence on the hospitality of her brothers: "My fortune is not adequate to an independent establishment."<sup>12</sup>

The heroine of Sedgwick's later novels would be more assertive than Jane, but they all reject the mores of nineteenth-century American society. It might be argued that the heroine of A New-England Tale projects a quiet strength. She remains undaunted by her misfortunes, and never loses her dignity or her composure. She deals with her sordid surroundings by transcending them. Her words have a certain ironic quality that is sometimes closer to arrogance than meekness. When Mrs. Wilson demands to be thanked for her charity, Jane says, "I do, ma'am feel grateful,

that I have shelter over my head; what more I have to be grateful for, time must determine" (p. 57). Jane Elton matures and becomes more decisive as the novel progresses. Mary Oakley's death teaches her the fragility of life, the importance of the present. David's treachery reveals to her the existence of evil. Armed with this awareness, Jane can sever her ties with the Wilsons. She can also break off her engagement with Erskine when she perceives that her principles are at odds with his behavior.

Mr. Lloyd, on the other hand, is indeed a colorless character; he is virtually translucent. All we know of his past is that his parents died while nursing the sick during a yellow-fever epidemic in Philadelphia, and that his saintly first wife has died of consumption. He is faceless, for the only descriptions we are given are of his broad-brimmed Quaker hat and his use of "thee" and "thou." He quietly stands by, encouraging Jane to withstand her ordeal at the Wilsons until she is of marriageable age. He is a good Samaritan in the neighborhood, financing Jane's education, rebuilding Mountain John's destroyed house, even averting a duel. Where he gets his money from is never disclosed.

It is Erskine, who is neither the hero nor truly the villain, who is the most lifelike character in the

book. He is a well drawn character for the very reason that Foster calls him "the flimsiest of Miss Sedgwick's villains."<sup>13</sup> He is reprehensible, but he is not a personification of evil. Without moral fibre, he is nevertheless capable of pangs of conscience. Spoiled by his wealthy parents because he is their only child, by the young ladies because he is handsome, and by his friends because he is fun-loving, he distinguishes himself at law school

"though he was seldom caught in the act of studying. . . . This (for he certainly was neither a genius nor a necromancer), might be attributed to an aptness at learning, and an excellent memory; but chiefly to an extraordinary facility at appropriating to himself the results of the labours of others" (p. 112).

Diverted by both Jane and her flamboyant cousin Elvira, he chooses Jane because he finds her refinement interesting and because he fancies himself in the role of hero. When Jane is not overly enthusiastic about their engagement, "he was surprised, perhaps slightly mortified, that she showed no more joy at having secured a station, to which he knew so many had aspired" (p. 181).

By far the most interesting character is Crazy Bet, who runs through the novel like a bright discordant thread. She is a ragged and fancifully

dressed madwoman, who wanders the countryside and attends every camp meeting, wedding, and funeral. The author mentions in her preface that Crazy Bet is the only character based on a real person (iv). Foster names the prototype as a Miss Susan Dunham, originally of Martha's vineyard, who suffered a broken heart and underwent a religious "awakening." Over a fifty year period she found hospitality at many homes, including Theodore Sedgwick's.<sup>14</sup> The fictional prototype--as well as the rustic setting--can be traced directly to British Romanticism. Crazy Bet bears a marked resemblance to the subject of Wordsworth's poem, "The Thorn."

"At all times of the day and night  
This wretched Woman thither goes;  
And she is known to every star,  
And every wind that blows;  
And there, beside the Thorn, she sits  
When the blue daylight's in the skies  
and when the whirlwind's on the hill,  
Or frosty air is keen and still,  
And to herself she cries,  
'Oh misery! oh misery!  
Oh woe is me! oh misery!"<sup>15</sup>

Crazy bet has the best lines in the novel. She serves as commentator and oracle. A believable character who represents the antithesis of convention, she is symbolic without being allegorical. She is both nature worshipper and fundamentalist Christian, and she is as mercurial as life itself.

Her entrance is unexpected; she walks uninvited through the door and sometimes the windows of Mrs. Wilson's house. She condemns Mrs. Wilson for her false charity and brings Jane a gift of carnations and a prophecy of marriage. "'I thought these bright colours would be a temptation to the Quaker. And I thought too,' said she, 'there should be something to send up a sweet smelling savour from the altar where there are no deeds of mercy laid'" (p. 56). Flowers are symbols for Bet as they are for Shakespeare's Ophelia:

"This," said she, "is a weed for Elder Carrol's hat; he lost his wife yesterday, and I have been to the very top of Tauconnick to get him a weed, that shall fresh as long as his grief. "See," added she, and she held it up laughing, "it has begun to wilt already; it is a true token" (p. 21).

Once she tears up a feather mattress belonging to Mrs. Wilson:

"But, Bet." said Jane, "Where are the feathers?"

"Where?, child," she replied, smiling without the most provoking indifference, "Where are last year's mourners? Where is yesterday's sunshine, or the morning's fog?"

We are reminded of the refrain of the poet Francois Villon--"ou sont les neiges?"

Bet attends every funeral to insure that there is "one true mourner." Sometimes she sleeps on

gravestones," for she said, there was no sleep so quiet as where the wicked did not trouble." She conducts a strange religious service in the woods at night, in which she recites from scripture and weeps for the trees that have been slaughtered by axes. Crazy Bet's communion with God and nature, though it takes place outside of the Church walls, would not necessarily be considered sacreligious by Unitarians. Dr. Kring describes the stance taken by Charles Follen, Minister of New York's Unitarian church and the husband of Sedgwick's closest friend, Eliza Cabot. Dr. Kring writes that

Follen conceived a new theology which would contain not simply the best insights but the true and permanent elements common to all earlier faiths. He considered religion to be neither theological speculation nor belief in dogma, but a serious and personal contemplation of the harmonious workings of the universe. Every human being, he felt, was inately endowed with an impulse to feel reverence for and dependence upon an Infinite Spirit, in whom we live and move and have our being.<sup>16</sup>

Although Follen did not speak for all Unitarians, his definition of Christianity would certainly encompass Sedgwick's characterization of Crazy Bet. Jane observes that "as beautiful a sanctuary of nature" as the forest is an appropriate place of worship (p. 138). We sense that Jane's conclusion

reflects Sedgwick's own. Sedgwick was not a nature-worshipper, but she revered nature, and her sympathetic portrayal implies respect for Bet's non-conformity. Bet refuses to accept society's conventions, its inhumanity, or its charity. When her death is near, she scorns Mr. Lloyd's attempts to cure her and put her in a rest home. Like a wounded animal, she returns to the forest.

It is unfortunate that Crazy Bet with her arresting presence, her eloquent dialogue, and symbolic depth has only a small part in the plot. Foster observes that Crazy Bet has

noticeably little relevance for the novel in proportion to her interest for the reader. That such a minor character should in the end assume so much importance, should be the most fully, or at least the most interestingly, developed person in the book suggests how poorly the author understood at this point the nature of fiction.<sup>17</sup>

A New-England Tale leaves this reader with the impression that it is a series of character studies rather than a story. Detailed portraits that represent abstract qualities are interspersed with thumbnail sketches, within the extended explication of Jane Elton's fictional biography. The book is a procession of people. At best, these descriptions have wit and variety, in the vein of The Canterbury

Tales, but too often they seem to be written by Chaucer's Prioress. Most of Sedgwick's characters are introduced largely for the purpose of illustrating the author's message. From the vantage point of the late twentieth century, these characters are cardboard, and the blatant didacticism is tiresome. But Sedgwick perceived the novel as a vehicle for conveying her ideas. It was, she stated, her intention to "further human virtue and improvement" (iii). If a song were to be balanced against a sermon, she would have considered the sermon to be more valuable.

Sedgwick's characters recall literary forms that predate the novel--as far back as the medieval morality plays. A case might be made for reading A New-England Tale as a nineteenth-century version of Everyman. The seven deadly sins are all represented. The pride and avarice of Mrs. Wilson, the lust and wrath of David, Martha's intemperance, Elvira's sloth, the envy of the townspeople. Jane's quest is akin to Christian's in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress (1678), a favorite book of nineteenth-century Americans. But unlike Christian and Everyman, Jane does not resist temptation--she transcends it. A New-England Tale represents a distinctly American and Unitarian world, a world which can be made better by sheer force of

will. Sedgwick approached literature through didacticism, and though she intended to achieve more than an exemplum, or a Sunday school sermon, she had not quite mastered the novel form.

In 1906 Seth Curtis Beach reviewed A New-England Tale:

It is not a masterpiece of literature but like all of Miss Sedgwick's works, it contains some fine delineations of character and vivid descriptions of local scenery. It can be read to-day with interest and pleasure. As a dramatic presentation of the self-righteous and the meek, in a New England country town a century ago, it is very effective. . . . The advantage of this kind of writing is that you do not miss the point of the story.

After the author has presented her moral, she leaves little room for entertainment. A New-England Tale does not fail simply because the didacticism is overpowering, but because it lacks a strong, unified plot. Very little happens to the characters in their lives or their minds, and what does happen is usually predictable. The characters are not revealed through their actions, but presented by means of description. Like so many other writers, Sedgwick was unwilling to release her grip on her readers. She tells us how we are to evaluate the proceedings, rather than guiding us to a conclusion through the novel's action.

The scenes with the most dramatic potential are left out. The author becomes a reporter presenting a brief synopsis. For instance, we are told that Crazy Bet recites unspecified passages of Scripture in a religious service that she holds in the forest. We do not learn what she said, only that Bet "poured out her soul in passages of scripture the most sublime and striking, woven together by her own glowing language" (p. 138). When Mrs. Wilson learns that Jane is leaving her household to marry Erskine, we are told that "she began the most violent threats and reproaches" (p. 169). Yet Sedgwick amply displays her ability to capture speech patterns and clever turns of phrase, in scenes of less dramatic consequence, such as Jane's conversations with her rural neighbors, or her chats with Elvira.

The book contains effective passages, intimations of fine writing that are not realized in A New-England Tale. There is a Gothic touch when Jane is required to go on a mysterious errand through a graveyard. The mood is eerie, though the scene is not motivated by the plot. Sedgwick's humour surfaces in scenes such as Elvira's acceptance of the school composition prize, her hair in a style which she fondly imagines to be "a la grecque." The ceremony is interrupted by an old man who recognizes the words of her essay from

an Old Boston newspaper his wife had pasted on the window to keep out draughts. There is melodrama, remarkably restrained, on the occasion of Jane's mother's funeral. The sexton, although accustomed to grief, asks that someone take away the bereft child who, "lost in the depth of her sufferings, seemed insensible to all external things" (p. 11).

Sedgwick's language is elegant and direct. It makes Cooper's style seem excessively ornate and Irving's prose antiquated by contrast. Her descriptions are powerful because she amasses peripheral details. It was perhaps the language, and not the American subject matter that made her book innovative in 1822.

Sedgwick's contemporaries celebrated her use of local color, which captured and interpreted New England in print. In this book we find one of the earliest portrayals of the "New England character." Sedgwick's depiction no doubt encouraged the notion that such a type exists. The New England villagers in her novel are hard working, plain speaking, and stoical. Incapacitating accidents do not deter them; a crippled farmer quickly makes the transition to innkeeper. They are outspoken; a woman sharply observes that Jane mourns at her mother's funeral as if she has lost all her relatives, and "she might as

well . . . for any good they will do her" (p. 15). At the end of the book, when Jane departs on her wedding trip with the Quaker, her neighbors tell her, "Now go, but do not forget there are other 'friends' in the world besides Quakers" (p. 220). Sedgwick credits New Englanders for valuing education:

There is nothing in New England so eagerly sought for or so highly prized by all classes of people as the advantages of education. A farmer and his wife will deny themselves all other benefits from . . . a summer of self-denial and toil, to give their children the privilege of a grammar-school during the winter. The public, or as they are called the towns-schools are open to all of the poorest labourers (p. 74).

It is in this passage that Sedgwick states for the first time what would become her credo: "As knowledge is one of the best helps and most certain securities to virtue, we doubtless owe a great portion of the morality of this blessed region . . . to these wise institutions of our pious ancestors" (p. 74).

A New-England Tale was the first widely read work to employ New England dialects, although Foster notes that Royall Tyler had set the precedent in 1782 in The Contrast.<sup>19</sup> The innkeeper of Becket, Massachusetts (an actual village) says:

Last week . . . there was the most tedious spell of weather I have seen sin the week before last thanksgiving, when my wife and I

went down into the lower part of Becket, to hear Deacon Hollister' funeral sarumont-- Don't you remember, Tempy, that musical fellow that was there?--"I don't see" says he "the use of the minister preaching up so much about hell-fire," says he, "it is a very good doctrine," says he, "to preach down on Connecticut River, but" says he, "I should not think it would frighten any body in such a cold place as Becket" (p. 42).

The innkeeper's children are Octavia, Valorous, and Desdemona, and the dog is Rodolphus. The names are acquired from books obtained from that proverbial transmitter of culture and housewares, the Yankee peddler.

Sedgwick also presents what she sees as the negative side of New Englanders, their eagerness to pass judgment, a degree of religious intolerance, and their lack of respect for one another's privacy. She writes, "We all know that from the habits of our people in a country town it is utterly impossible for the most skillful manoeverer to keep his pecuniary affairs secret from the keen and quick observation of his neighbors" (p. 7). Village life was also monotonous. Sedgwick writes of "the sober, sedate manners of the New-England people, and the unvaried tenor of their lives" (p. 18). This was why the outlandish Crazy Bet was not only tolerated, but welcomed, "from house to house, and town to town, her stimulated imagination furnishing continual amusement

to the curious by her sagacious observations, and unfailing mirth to the young and vulgar" (p. 18).

There are references to superstitions and legends that flourished in New England around the time of the Revolution. We are told of poor Lucy Willett, whose lover was executed for participating in Shay's Rebellion. Lucy had to be pried from her dead lover's body, and subsequently drowned herself. For this deed she was denied a Christian burial, so her gravestone is outside of the cemetery. Crazy Bet speaks of the belief that all the dead "lie with a merry company about them in the church yard," conversing with one another after dark (p. 136). We find this same legend worked into Thornton Wilder's twentieth-century play, Our Town.

Catharine Sedgwick unwittingly offers modern readers the important insight about the last century that death was an almost constant presence. Death scenes occur with regularity in the book, from Jane's parents in the first pages, to Crazy Bet at the end. The townspeople routinely sit up with the dead and dying. Yet death is not an overpowering theme because it is presented in such a matter-of-fact way. The funeral scene is the only one included primarily for melodramatic effect and that scene has the dual function of stressing Jane's isolation.

A passage in Catharine Sedgwick's second novel, Redwood, underlines how commonplace it was to see a body laid out in the house awaiting burial. The houseguest, who is unwell and melancholy, catches sight of the corpse of a young man in an adjacent bedroom. We are assured that "At another time, or in health, Mr. Redwood would have been quite unmoved by such a spectacle."<sup>20</sup>

The regularity with which the death of a relative, friend, or neighbor is mentioned in Sedgwick's journals serves to remind us of how short was the life expectancy. Her descriptions of the deaths of her brothers Henry and Robert include gruesome references to therapeutic bloodletting and extended periods of delirium.<sup>21</sup> When Catharine returned to her childhood home, she was haunted by the memories of the dead:

I would have slept but what memories came thronging there--My mother--my sick, afflicted, dying mother--just where I was lying was she when I heard her last groan--in the very room Charles and I were born--Oh how the dead rose before me--My memory seemed as the Germans call their burying ground "Godsfield."<sup>22</sup>

It is no wonder that religion was a constant preoccupation in those days.

Other aspects of early nineteenth-century New England life were deliberately included to make the

novel seem authentically American. A duel is presented with chilling realism. Sedgwick describes "the meeting at day-light in the morning in a neighboring wood, which had never been disturbed by a harsher sound than a sportsman's gun," and how "the ground was marked out, the usual distance prescribed by the second." The duelers are Erskine and a fellow-gambler named Rivington. When "the principles were just about to take their stations," Mr. Lloyd, on his morning walk, is grazed by a bullet, and "Rivington was, to use a vulgar expression, literally 'scared out of his wits.'" He begs for mercy and everyone else is "mortified" (p. 218).

One episode is a bit of Americana that is perhaps addressed to British readers. Elvira and her new husband, Lavoisier, accidentally stay at an inn where he had once borrowed and neglected to return a horse. The host and a group of soldiers decide to tar and feather the Frenchman. We are given the recipe: They heat a skillet of tar on the fire, and tear up a pillow for the feathers. But the process is abandoned when Elvira intercedes. Sedgwick assures us that "We rather think monsieur would have been released without interposition of his distressed bride, for a Yankee mob is proverbially good natured, and the merry men had enlisted in the landlord's cause, for the sake of

a joke, rather than with the intention of inflicting pain" (pp. 240-41).

Although the intensely patriotic Catharine Sedgwick was sometimes overly eager to present the United States in a favorable light, the wealth of details about everyday life make this novel a significant historical document. The book also represents a milestone in American literature. When it appeared in 1822 Sedgwick's contemporaries pronounced it to be one of the first authentic American novels. They were delighted to see their own time and place captured in print. The characters and setting could be identified not only as the United States, but as the New England region. Henry Sedgwick, on reading his sister's first novel, wrote to her, "I don't know of anything which no give me so much excitement as the certain prospect of your future eminence."<sup>23</sup>

Foster writes that objections to the book on religious grounds continued into the 1850's.<sup>24</sup> But the book was celebrated for its moralistic slant for more often than it was condemned for its religious liberalism. The heroine of A New-England Tale declares that "religion alone can produce unity of spirit; alone can resist the tempests of life" (p. 214). In time Sedgwick would become a respected

literary figure whose books would be commended by numerous educators and clergymen. Catharine Sedgwick creates a world in which justice ultimately triumphs and people are inherently good. Americans in the first years of the republic found these ideas extremely appealing.

Tastes in fiction have changed, and the book did not prove to have lasting merit as literature. But the elements that made it a best seller remain the most interesting aspects of the novel: the local color, the popularization of once-current religious issues, the typecasting of the New England character. What Sedgwick's readers recognized as familiar and relevant, we look upon as curiosities. A New-England Tale now serves to illuminate a world that is no longer with us.

Notes to Chapter III

<sup>1</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick, A New-England Tale (New York: E. Bliss and E. White, 1822), I, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Sedgwick, A New-England Tale, pp. 90-91. All further references to this work appear in the text.

<sup>3</sup> Seth Curtis Beach, Daughters of the Puritans (1905; rpt. Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1905), p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Halsey Foster, Catharine Maria Sedgwick (New York: Twayne, 1974), p. 53.

<sup>5</sup> "Journal of Reminiscences," p. 20. MS. This and all other journals and letters are in the Catharine Maria Sedgwick Papers, The Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Ma.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Donald Kring, Liberals Among the Orthodox (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), p. 49.

<sup>7</sup> Perry Miller, ed., The American Transcendentalists; Their Prose and Poetry (Garden City: N.Y.: 1957), ix.

<sup>8</sup> Kring, p. 242.

<sup>9</sup> Ann Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), p. 161.

<sup>10</sup> Foster, p. 49.

<sup>11</sup> Foster, p. 48.

<sup>12</sup> Journal, 8 May 1829, MS.

<sup>13</sup> Foster, p. 48.

<sup>14</sup> Foster, p. 52.

<sup>15</sup> William Wordsworth, "The Thorn," in The English Romantic Poets, ed. Marius Bewley (New York: Modern Library, 1970), p. 135.

- 16 Kring, p. 243.
- 17 Foster, pp. 52-3.
- 18 Beach, p. 28.
- 19 Foster, p. 51.
- 20 Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Redwood (New York: E. Bliss and E. White, 1824).
- 21 Journal, December 1821, MS; Letter to Mrs. Watson, 10 April 1828, ALS.
- 22 Journal, 27 August 1837.
- 23 Mary Dewey, ed., Life and Letters of C.M. Sedgwick (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1871), pp. 152-53.
- 24 Foster, p. 153.

## CHAPTER IV

### Presentiment

The landlord was sitting on a bench before the door, alternately reading a newspaper, and haranging half a dozen loiterers on the great political topics that then agitated the country: his own patriotic politics were sufficiently indicated by the bearings of his sign-board; on one side of which was rudely sketched the surrender of Burgoyne, and on the other an American eagle with his talons triumphantly planted on a British lion."<sup>1</sup>

. . .

"What a little enthusiast you are, Ellen. You would make an admirable lay-preacher; but in the present rage for division of labour, it is not proper to preach and practice too."<sup>2</sup>

Less than two years intervened between the publication of Catharine Sedgwick's first and second novels. The success of A New-England Tale had undoubtedly encouraged the author. The book had been welcomed by critics and the public as one of America's first authentic novels and praised for its realistic depiction of small-town life. The favorable reception of her first novel had taken Sedgwick by surprise but she had a following now, and was aware of it. The role of

popular novelist was one that she assumed with trepidation. In the preface of Redwood she found it necessary to justify the writing of novels before she could, as she put it, "overcome her reluctance to appear before the public" a second time (viii).

In essence, the preface of Redwood is a defense of fiction. Sedgwick's argument is that novels serve to transmit culture and to popularize the works of the ancients: "Very few persons now read the works of Aristotle, and not many those of Bacon; but the wisdom which they taught, or perhaps collected, is now spread far and wide by numerous modes of diffusion, and is incorporated into the minds of thousands who know nothing of its origin" (vi). With the ironic tone that occasionally surfaces in her prose, she adds that "We may even remark that one cannot turn over the pages of a modern jest book or the files of a village newspaper, without meeting embodied in narratives of the incidents of the day the essence of the same jokes which nearly two thousand years ago Cicero related for the amusement of his patrician friends" (viii).

We have previously noted that it was common for readers in the early nineteenth century to regard novels as a suspect form. Sedgwick addresses those who perceived fiction as frivolous, or even depraved. She argues that the reading of novels was, at worst, a

harmless pastime, one that filled "a vacant house which might otherwise be less profitably employed" (viii). It was also her belief that novels might serve to transmit ethics, as well as knowledge, in an appealing manner. She wrote, "We cannot but indulge the hope that there will be found those who will derive amusement if not instruction from our humble efforts. We will at least, venture to claim . . . that if they can do no good, they will do no harm" (ix).

Sedgwick's concept of the nature of a novel had evolved from the experience of writing one, as a comparison of Redwood with A New-England Tale will demonstrate. Sedgwick had readily admitted that her first book was an expanded tract on her Unitarian faith.<sup>3</sup> In fact, the controversy arising from the unflattering portrayal of Calvinism had helped to draw widespread attention to the book. But if the handling of the subject matter had enhanced the book's popular appeal, it had also contributed to its failure as a work of literature. In A New-England Tale a series of illustrations takes the place of a plot, and heavy-handed narrative and stock characters show all too clearly the marks of the sermon that the book had been in its original form. In her second novel, however, Sedgwick expresses the intention to eschew the religious theme: "We have not composed a tale professedly

or chiefly of a religious nature, as if, left to the bias of our own inclination, we might possibly have done. We do not think such attempts have heretofore been eminently successful; or that narrative sermons are of a nature to be particularly interesting" (ix). Throughout her career, Sedgwick would transmit her moral convictions through the medium of fiction. From the experience of writing her first novel she had learned that if she wished to keep her readers' attention, she would have to entertain them.

In A New-England Tale Sedgwick had explicated a religious philosophy, which the action of the novel had served to illustrate. In Redwood she creates characters who are the exponents of various classes and regions in the United States, and shows them both coexisting and in conflict. Redwood is a portrait of American society in the years immediately following the War of Independence. It is a more ambitious project than A New-England Tale and it taps more of the possibilities inherent in the novel form. Her inclination of local dialects and descriptions of scenery add to the regional flavor of her portrait of rural New England in the Federalist period. The setting varies, the characters are relatively complex, and the plot twists and turns in some surprising ways.

Unlike A New-England Tale, which opens with an account of the heroine's parentage, Redwood begins in medias res. Henry Redwood, a gentleman from Virginia, is in the midst of a tour of the Great Lakes region, accompanied by his daughter Caroline. On the shores of Lake Champlain, their carriage is overtaken by a thunderstorm. A tree is hit by lightning, the horses bolt, and Mr. Redwood is injured. He is carried to the neighboring farmhouse of the Lenox family, where it is determined that he will need to pass a lengthy convalescence.

The Lenox household consists of the farmer, his wife, and six of their eight children--one son having left to become "a popular clergyman in one of our Southern states" and the other to found a town in Ohio" (I, 32). Two other residents of the farmhouse are Aunt Debby, dispenser of folk wisdom, and the beautiful Ellen Bruce, whose origins are obscure.

On the evening of the Redwoods' arrival at the farmhouse, a wake is being held in an upstairs room for a young man of the village who has died of a broken heart. Among those who are gathered around the body are his aunt Susan and sister Emily, who are converts to the Shaker sect. The villagers deplore "the backsliding of Emily" who "has been befooled by the Shaking Quakers" (pp. 86-88). Ellen Bruce

attempts to effect a family reconciliation, but she is interrupted by the entrance of a Shaker official named Reuben Harrington, who chants and dances wildly around the corpse until he is ejected by Aunt Debby.

As the days pass, Caroline expresses increasing impatience that her father's injury necessitates that she remain "at a vulgar farmer's" (I, 118). We learn that Caroline is Redwood's daughter by his second wife, for he had been secretly married in his youth to a governess who had died of consumption. The second Mrs. Redwood was a prominent Charleston lady, and when she too died, Caroline was raised by her Charleston grandmother. Redwood has pursued a diplomatic career abroad, and at retirement he has returned to find his adolescent daughter intolerably spoiled and selfish, "the idol of the fashionable world, and as completely au fait in all its arts and mysteries, as a veteran belle of five and twenty" (I, 79).

At the invitation of Redwood, a Charles Westall and his mother arrive at the farm. Westall's father had been the only respectable friend of Redwood's youth--his other companions all having been dissolute. The younger Westall is as admirable as his father, and Redwood hopes that he will marry Caroline. She immediately captivates Westall: when she "roused all her power to charm him, he yielded to the influence of

her beauty and her vivacity" (I, 178). But Ellen Bruce gains his admiration when he learns how she has tended a little blind girl in the village, taught her to sew, and brought a doctor to see her. Caroline, jealous of her rival, speculates that Ellen is illegitimate, and announces to the company assembled in the parlor, "I have finally come to the conclusion, that she is, as you know, papa, old Colonel Linton used to call such people, of the Melchisedeck family" (I, 213). Ellen overhears this accusation and enters to defend herself. She says that the proof of her parentage is in a locked box that her mother stipulated should not be opened until Ellen reaches twenty-one, an event which has not yet occurred. Westall rushes to Ellen's defense and shows his disdain for Caroline.

At this point Caroline decides to pry open the box. She finds a miniature of Redwood, a lock of hair, and a letter revealing that Ellen is her legal half-sister. She replaces the empty picture frame, so that the box will continue to rattle, and confiscates the other contents. She also confronts Ellen and accuses her of assuming an artless manner in order to win Westall's esteem.

Shortly thereafter Ellen receives a note from Emily, smuggled out of the Shaker community by a

passing traveler, indicating that Emily is an unwilling convert and would like to marry one of the Lenox sons. Ellen and Aunt Debby set out to rescue her. On the road they meet Westall, who declares his love for Ellen, but she is too abashed to reply. Meanwhile, at the Shaker community in Hancock, Massachusetts, Emily's unhappiness has been noticed, and she is sent every day to Reuben Harrington for counseling. Reuben's duplicity is revealed when he pretends he has obtained a special dispensation to marry Emily. He abducts her and decides to hide her at the hut of a drunken Indian named Sooduck, until the furor over their absence dies down.

When Ellen and Debby arrive at Hancock, they learn from the Shakers that Emily has fallen victim "to the evils of Satan by his servant Harrington" (II, 197). The two women decide to make further inquiries at Lebanon and take the waters there. They come upon the Indian's dog, who leads them to the hut where they find Emily alive, but the Indian dead of natural causes. Reuben is captured when he returns for Emily: he faces the additional charge of embezzlement of the Shaker's funds.

Back at the farm, Westall tells Redwood of his love for Ellen, and the ailing Redwood unburdens himself to Westall concerning the profligacy of his

youth and his neglect of his first wife and Caroline. He expresses concern that Caroline's current beau, a Captain Fitzgerald, seems to be a "fortune hunter."

On Ellen's twenty-first birthday she opens the box and finds only the empty picture frame. But Caroline, who has just eloped with Fitzgerald, has left behind the contents of the box. Ellen now has proof that her mother had been legally married to Redwood and was descended from poor but respectable Scots. Caroline soon returns to her father's sickbed; she wishes to spare herself censure should he die in her absence. Ellen is so kind to her that Caroline is remorseful and the two sisters are reconciled.

Two years later Westall and Ellen are married, Emily has left the Shakers and married one of the Lenox sons, and Fitzgerald and Caroline have inexplicably died in the West Indies. Redwood has survived his illness, after all.

With the intricate plot of Redwood, Catharine Sedgwick realizes more of the possibilities of the novel form than she had with her first literary venture, A New-England Tale. But the structure of her second novel is marred by discontinuity, by numerous digressions and excessive detail. The action is suspended to allow for extensive passages recounting the histories of the characters prior to their

appearance on the scene. The first of these interruptions occurs early in the novel. After describing the carriage accident, Sedgwick's leaves the Redwoods at the farmhouse to apprise the readers of Henry Redwood's life story up to that time. We learn of his dissolute youth, his early secret marriage, his travels in Europe, and his marriage to Caroline's mother. Relevant though the information might be, its quantity is overwhelming, and it breaks the flow of the novel. We have difficulty readjusting to the world of the Lenox farmhouse when the author picks up the thread of the narrative again. Another digression describing Ellen's youth and upbringing, is thirty-two pages long. Toward the end of Volume II, when the novel is winding to a close, we are presented with the history of a well-to-do Miss Campbell, who befriends Ellen and Debby at Saratoga. Miss Campbell appears only briefly in the book, yet we are given a lengthy history of Miss Campbell's childhood, the story of her conversion to the Moravian faith, and a description of her rich uncle's circumstances. Perhaps the most blatant digression is the discourse on the Shakers. This section is so lengthy that Foster refers to it as a "subplot." In fact, the information on Shaker customs is the subject of a distinct and extensive section of the book, and it is not integrated into the narrative.

Unlike readers of the present day who are accustomed to a spare narrative style, Sedgwick's contemporaries were receptive to leisurely, even rambling novels. All thirty-two of Cooper's novels average 500 pages in length, including The Spy, considered the official forerunner of American fiction. Redwood set the pattern for Sedgwick's subsequent novels--six hundred pages printed in a two-volume set. But Sedgwick's problem with Redwood was one of organization, rather than editing. Her characters and their motivations are presented to the readers in a series of essays, rather than revealed through the action. Moreover, the author did not separate what was essential to the plot from what was interesting to her.

The section of Redwood on the Shakers is neither essential to the plot, nor is it well blended into the narrative. But in this instance the subject is likely to be as fascinating to the readers as it seems to have been to the author. The Shakers were an American phenomenon, a sect which combined celibacy and communal living, that had as its spiritual leader a woman called Mother Ann. Sedgwick describes in detail the communal kitchen and dining rooms and the workshops where was created the furniture that were masterpieces of functional art. She reports that "all

the mechanical and manual labours distinct from the housewifery (a profane term in this application) are performed in offices a convenient distance from the main dwelling." She provides a vivid account of the Shakers' worship service:

After a few moments, the deep and reverential silence of the assembly was broken by a shout, in which every living voice was simultaneously lifted to its highest pitch . . . The singing was accompanied by an equal and steady motion, an alternating from one foot to the other. . . . This deafening yell and uniform motion continued till their breath was spent, when all the assembly, as if governed by one instinct, relapsed into silence . . . [and] made in a dancing procession the circuit of the two apartments . . . with a uniform shuffling step as if it were composed of so many automatons, their arms rising and falling mechanically (II, 41-43).

With her first novel Sedgwick had already set the precedent of injecting a topic of historical interest into her fiction. In A New-England Tale the subject had been Shay's rebellion. Her later novels Hope Leslie and Linwoods are historical fiction. Undoubtedly, as the section in Redwood on the Shakers demonstrates, Sedgwick was more a historian than a novelist. She writes with sociological and historical perspective, more often than with artistic vision.

The material on the Shakers added authenticity to the novel that would, according to William Cullen Bryant, "exalt our national reputation abroad, . . .

to show what copious and valuable materials the private lives and daily habits of our countrymen offer the writer of genius."<sup>4</sup> The Shakers were a timely subject for Americans in 1824. Catharine Sedgwick reported that the sect "now boasts that its outposts have advanced to the frontiers of civilization--to Kentucky--Ohio--and Indiana" (I, 35). Foster writes that "Some New Englanders undoubtedly felt that the Shakers posed a threat to traditional pattern of life in the Northeast . . . they were able to convince the sons and daughters of many New England families to become Shakers."<sup>5</sup> Sedgwick's descriptions of the Shakers' strange rituals undoubtedly added to the book's popular appeal, all the more because of the factual nature of the material. As Russel Nye observes, "The popular audience expects entertainment, instruction, or both, rather than an 'aesthetic experience.'"<sup>6</sup>

Sedgwick drew upon several well-established conventions of fiction when she wrote Redwood. At odd intervals she follows the tradition set by Samuel Richardson of the epistolary style of presenting the action. Some of the passages that acquaint the readers with Redwood's youth, are presented in the form of letters written by him to his friends. The letter format is abruptly abandoned midway through the

section, and the narrator takes over. The novel also includes a letter by Caroline in which she recounts the carriage accident and subsequent events in great detail, almost precisely as they had been described earlier by the narrator. The epistolary mode is used again at the close of the novel, when the author reveals the contents of the interminable letter that Ellen Bruce's mother had placed in the locked box. Sedgwick seemed to have been aware that this letter is excessively long and detailed, for she includes the following sentence: (II, 265) "Every word of this letter, which may appear long and tedious to an indifferent reader, sank deep into Ellen's heart." The epistolary mode, hardly justified in the context of Redwood, seems almost salutary, as if Sedgwick did not yet feel entirely at ease in the medium of fiction.

It is noteworthy, however, Sedgwick rarely resorted to melodrama, which would become the mainstay of the next generation of popular fiction writers. It is only in the conclusion that we find a case of melodrama: In a scene of reconciliation, Redwood acknowledges Ellen as his daughter, and Ellen forgives Caroline for confiscating the evidence of her parentage and attempting to end her love affair with Westall. "Caroline, deeply affect, knelt before her

father," writes Sedgwick. "Ellen sank on her knees beside her, and clasping his arm and her sister, she raised her tearful eyes to Mr. Redwood.

'Severed--strangers,' she said, 'as we have been on earth, we may yet be a family in heaven'" (II, 281). Catharine Sedgwick notes that "the beautiful sisters were a spectacle at which heaven might rejoice, for they seemed to embody penitence and perfect love" (II, 269). Sedgwick tries to circumvent bathos by turning at once to practical considerations. Redwood, from his sickbed, relents and grants Caroline an allowance, although he had threatened to disinherit her for eloping with the fortune hunter. At this time we learn that Caroline's slave has escaped. "She [the slave] had been carrying on a snug love affair with the servant of a West Indian planter then at Lebanon" (II, 270). Sedgwick ends Redwood with a double wedding and a double elopement. Where as A New-England Tale concluded with only one of each.

The double wedding, the hidden identity of the heroine, and the series of coincidences upon which the plot is built are in a tradition that can be traced to Shakespeare. This reader was not troubled by these literary devices. But Edward Halsey Foster is of the opinion that "Ellen's hidden identity and various other plot conventions lead the author at times into

producing a novel that already been written many times before."<sup>7</sup> William Cullen Bryant, who was a close friend of Sedgwick, took exception to the novel's plot structure. In his review of Redwood for The North American Review he wrote:

We must frankly say, that there is a want of perfect verisimilitude in the means by which the catastrophe is brought about. There is something a little too strange, for a story of real life, in the obscurity that hangs about Ellen's birth, and in the mysterious box containing the miniature of her father, and the solomn epistle from her mother, which Ellen is under a strict charge not to open until a certain age, or until she has fashioned a matrimonial connexion. These things remind us too strongly of the material of romances. It is not a little extraordinary also, that Ellen's father should travel from a distant province to the very spot where his daughter was, and should there meet with an accident, by which he was confined for weeks in the very house where Ellen resided, that the matrimonial connexion, which left her at liberty to explore the mysterious tokens of her birth should be formed during his stay in the northern states, and that it should be formed with the very man whom, of all others, he most desired to call his son in law.

Bryan softens his comment:

But we ought not perhaps to criticise too sternly these expedients for helping out the plot of a novel. The many dispensations granted to the tribe of poets to overleap certain settled rules, grew long ago into a body of established privileges, under the name of licentia poetica.<sup>8</sup>

Despite weaknesses in the plot structure, the action is more effectively presented in Redwood than

it had been in Sedgwick's first novel. The most significant evolution is that the characters in Redwood are created through events, rather than through commentary. Redwood is a full-fledged novel, and not merely an exemplum with some of the features of a novel. As we have previously indicated, the most dramatic episodes in A New-England Tale, such as Crazy Bet's sermon in the woods and Jane's final confrontation with Mrs. Wilson, are not enacted, but reported to us after they have occurred. In Redwood the central scenes are dramatized. We witness the disruption of a wake by the Shaker official, Reuben Harrington, who

"began, not humming, but shouting, with the utmost power of his voice, a Shaker tune, at all times sufficiently dissonant, and that now in the apartment of death and sorrow, sounded like a howl of an infernal: to this music her shuffled and whirled in the manner which his sect called dancing and labour worship."

"Stop your dumb pow-wow!" cried Debby, seizing him by the arm with a force that might have made a stouter heart than Reuben's rejoice in the protection of the convenient principle of non-resistance" (I, 96).

The reader is also permitted to witness the dramatic confrontation between Caroline and her father, who berates her for neglecting him and for eloping with the opportunist, Captain Fitzgerald.

Redwood exclaims, "You would desert your sick--your dying father, to go off with this fellow--a stranger--a fortune hunter--a profligate!" (II, 222).

The introduction of verbal confrontations such as these makes Redwood more entertaining than A New-England Tale. It also heightens the realism of the characterization. The remarkably lifelike Caroline Redwood is a character created primarily through dramatic dialogue. She has some of the best lines in the novel. With the first words she utters in the novel's opening scenes, Caroline's personality is established. She is tired of her father's sight-seeing along the shores of Lake Champlain, and says to him, "You sat rolling your eyes around the green fields as if they were all drawing-rooms, and every dew-drop a diamond, while I would gladly have drowned myself in the St. Lawrence" (I, 15). Later, from her exile at the farmhouse, Caroline refers nostalgically to her conquests among the military officers in New York City: "I can scarcely believe that not much more than a month has elapsed since I was parading Broadway with Captain Fenwick--(by the way, Broadway is a sublime place for a real show-off)" (I, 118). Appalled at the prospect of missing fashionable society for the duration of her father's convalescence at what she terms "a vulgar farmer's," (I, 118) she protests,

"My dear father, you surely will not suffer yourself to be murdered by a country doctor: Pray, pray, remember poor ROSE."

"Your grandmother's lap-dog? do not be a simpleton, Caroline."

"I do not see, replied Caroline, still in a tone of eager expostulation," "how Rose being a dog alters the case. I am sure grandmama thought as much of her as of any friend she had in the world" (I, 35).

Through witty dialogue, rather than through commentary, Sedgwick not only portrays Caroline, but conveys her disapproval of her. She also provides insight into the formation of Caroline's character. Just as the Wilson children in A New-England Tale perpetuated the dishonesty they had learned at home, Caroline's shallowness reflects her upbringing: (I, 79) "At the age of seven, the grandmother's vanity no longer brooking delay, the child was produced at balls and rouses, where her singular beauty attracted every eye, and her dextrous, graceful management of her little person, already ruled to the principles of Vestris called forth loud applause." The two were "unconscious of the sidelong looks of contempt and whispered sneers which their pride fully provoked." Sedgwick even explains the motivations of Caroline's grandmother, who "evinced her grief for the death of her daughter, by lavishing on her a twofold measure of the indulgences and flatteries that spoiled the mother" (I, 78).

Caroline is no villainess, petty and self-seeking through she is. Sedgwick had difficulty portraying evil. Apparently she found it hard to comprehend. Even Reuben Harrington, though Aunt Debby refers to him as the "master devil" of the Shakers, (I, 94), is unsavory rather than diabolical. He dupes the Shakers, seduces and abducts an innocent girl, and is memorably described as having "a peculiarly cunning expression from a trick he had early acquired, and of which he could never rid himself, of tipping a knowing wink" (I, 95). Yet he is a grotesque caricature, rather than a convincing villain. In Catharine Sedgwick's world, justice wins out and order is always restored. Reuben Harrington is soon thwarted, and Caroline loses Westall and repents of her misdeeds. Caroline's early death seems an invention by Sedgwick that is atypically harsh. Perhaps the author was baffled by her own most glamorous creation. This extraordinarily lifelike character does not seem to be a person who is likely to change her ways, and Sedgwick resolves the problem by killing her off. Equally unexpected is the survival of Henry Redwood, despite the inclusion of an apparent deathbed scene. But Redwood, unlike Caroline, is depicted in a manner that makes his repentance credible, and Sedgwick was clearly intent on salvaging as many people as she

could, for her novel reflects her profound faith in what she termed "human virtue and improvement."<sup>9</sup>

Sedgwick notion of human goodness is personified in Ellen Bruce, whose most outstanding virtue is her selfless dedication to others. Aunt Debby remarks that Ellen "has had troubles that would fret some people to death, and yet I have seldom seen her with a cloudy face." She adds the Ellen "has been so busy making other people happy that she has no time to think of herself; instead of grieving about her own troubles, she has tried to lessen other people's; instead of telling about her own feelings and thinking about them, you would not know she had any, if you did not see she always knew just how other people felt" (II, 176). Ellen is more energetic than Jane Elton, the heroine of A New-England Tale. Rather than simply being good, Ellen does good. She takes care of a poor blind girl and risks her life to save a child from being run over by a horse and carriage. She sets out with Debby Lenox to rescue Emily from the Shakers, an unconventional and hazardous expedition for two unescorted women in the early nineteenth century. In the course of their journey the two women find themselves on the wrong road at nightfall. Debby says to Ellen that "if the daylight does not last, we have a

moon to-night, and thanks to fortune, neither you nor I are afraid of anything" (II, 114).

Ellen is a less believable character than Jane Elton, and seems more often the personification of Christian Charity than a human being. Sedgwick writes that Ellen "in a simple white dress, her face beaming with tender sympathy, looked like the embodied spirit of religion. Perhaps beauty is never more touching than when exclusively occupied with the sufferings of others" (I, 112). In one passage Debby and Westall compare the beauty of Ellen and Caroline. Debby declares that Caroline's face is "as cold as marble," and that Ellen resembles "that pictur [sic] of the Virgin Mary that George sent home." Westall replies,

"Oh, Miss Debby, I confess myself vanquished. I give up on the face, but you will certainly have the candour to allow that Miss Redwood has the finest figure; so tall and graceful--she moves like Juno."  
"That I won't deny. She is just like one of them heathen idols" (I, 232).

Although Ellen may seem to some readers to be less lifelike and less attractive than Caroline. William Cullen Bryant may reveal his contemporaries' notion of a heroine when he writes about Ellen Bruce. In his review of Redwood he calls her "a beautiful vision of feminine sweetness, loveliness, and rectitude of heart and understanding." Bryant refers

to Aunt Debby Lenox as "a great favorite of ours,"<sup>10</sup> and Foster observes that "Because she comments frequently about Ellen's virtues and Caroline's vices, she serves as Miss Sedgwick's moral commentator in the story."<sup>11</sup> Benevolence takes a distinctive form in the person of Aunt Debby, who is over six feet tall and almost toothless. We are told that her hair was

Confined in a long braid, and so closely bound with black ribbon, that it did not require, in her judgment, more than a weekly adjustment. The only relic of wordly or womanly vanity which Debby displayed, was a string of gold beads, which, according to tradition that had been carefully transmitted to the younger members of her family, had been given to their Aunt Debby some thirty years before by a veteran soldier, who at the close of the revolutionary war, was captivated by the martial air of the then young amazon (I, 31).

Aunt Debby is not as much an American as she is a New Englander. She wants Caroline to see the sun rise, so that "when he comes sailing over those hills, and pours a shower of light on Champlain, you'll own there is not such a sight in all the Car'linas" (I, 275). Out of her element among fashionable society at Lebanon, Debby embarrasses Ellen with her blunt speech and lack of refinement. Minutiae of America's past are provided in the description of Debby's attire, which appears odd and antiquated to Ellen's

generation: a costume of iridescent fabric, with threads of purple and orange, called a "changeable" and worn with the inevitable gold beads (II, 133). But at home on the farm, Debby is equally capable of setting the bones of men and livestock.

The verisimilitude of this character no doubt contributed to Sedgwick's recognition by her contemporaries as an authentic American writer. "The peculiarities in the manners and character of our countrymen," Bryant observed, combine "with much that is ennobling and elevated, with traits of sagacity, benevolence, moral courage and magnanimity."<sup>12</sup> In time, Aunt Debby became the prototype for a stock figure in American fiction, the forthright, self-reliant New England spinster.

A survivor of the War in Independence, of hardship and personal disappointment, Aunt Debby observes the world with sympathy and equanimity. She tell Henry Redwood:

"Our days are all numbered . . . and to all there comes a sickness that neither doctors nor doctors-trade can cure; and beside, as to in'ard diseases, there's none but your pretensioners that profess to understand them at all times . . . and it is far easier mending broken bones than broken hearts."

"And far easier breaking bones than hearts," replied Mr. Redwood.

"That," said the indefatigable Deborah, "depends something upon what the heart is made of" (I, 29).

Henry Redwood might be described as fainthearted, for his most outstanding quality is his weakness of spirit. He is one of the earliest anti-heroes of American fiction. Although he is seldom offstage, and we learn his history in detail, he is not a strong presence in the novel. The book's title, Redwood, may refer as much to Ellen as to her father. "Henry Redwood carried through life a fast-rooted misery," Sedgwick writes, "a sense of injustice recklessly committed; a feeling of degradation that led him to turn from all that is fair and good as a sick eye shuts out the light of heaven" (I, 76). He is also convinced that "he never came in contact with the good and lovely without inflicting suffering on them" (I, 266). The course of his life has been determined by default. The death of his first wife and his ignorance of Ellen's existence are the result of his negligence. He passively allows his parents to choose his second wife, and he shrinks from his parental responsibilities. His diplomatic career is moderately successful, but he fulfills neither his intellectual nor his human potential.

Sedgwick seems to place particular emphasis on Redwood's unwillingness to publicly acknowledge his first wife. He recognizes her fine qualities but cannot forget that she had been a servant. The

passages on Ellen's mother are striking for their irony. Redwood describes his first wife to one of his dissolute companions as "a young fortune, without connexions, innocent, and beautiful, and religious; an odd combination, is it not?" (I, 61). Redwood's wife imagines that he keeps their marriage secret because he contemplates bigamy--she has learned of the numerous flirtations of his youth. She develops

"a deep conviction that her husband was corrupt, more corrupt in principle than in conduct; and his conduct the natural and necessary result of his principles. Ignorant as she was of the ways of the world, and all the intolerance and artificial distinctions," writes Sedgwick, "she had never dreamed that her lowly fortune and rank opposed a barrier to her acknowledgment" (I, 66).

Although the first Mrs. Redwood's naivete seems farfetched, the episode can be read as an expression of the author's own opposition to "intolerance and artificial distinctions." Redwood can be interpreted on one level as an examination of the rigid class structure in the United States that belied the democratic ideals of the Constitution. The strained relations between classes, enacted on the stage of the Lenox farmhouse, is a recurring theme in the novel. At the beginning of the story the rural innkeeper is discourteous to Redwood because he is clearly a wealthy gentleman, and a short time later Redwood

expresses impatience at the excessively long discourse of a farmer from whom he asks directions. When Aunt Debby is sent for to look at Redwood's broken shoulder, she is engaged in setting the leg of a horse. Debby exclaims that "the old mare . . . she guessed she felt as much pain with her broken leg as your quality" (I, 26). When the country doctor urges Caroline to display cheerfulness in her father's presence, she replies

"It is a demand I cannot answer, sir. I might as well call spirits from the vasty deep, as summon mine at pleasure. Grandmamma always said cheerfulness was a virtue that belonged to common people--quite necessary for them. I am never melancholy, however. Melancholy only suits the old and unfortunate; and if I must remain here, I will try not to hang myself" (I, 40).

The villagers are awed by Caroline's elegant attire and her air of sophistication, and Westall quickly succumbs to her charm. But Aunt Debby is not impressed by Caroline. The words that are so memorable when spoken by Claggart in Melville's Billy Budd, are spoken by Aunt Debby in Redwood: "Handsome is that handsome does" (I, 116). The author comments that people often form "childish judgments by externals, forgetting that the most brilliant hues are reflected by empty vapours" (I, 78).

Fashionable society places great value upon superficialities, according to the author of Redwood.

Ellen is accepted by the well-to-do who frequent to spa at Lebanon, but not because of her noble character. She is told that "one of the young ladies observed that her mama said she 'was sure you were genteel from the first moment she saw you, you wore such particularly fine lace, and a real camel's hair!'" (II, 214).

The subject of money frequently recurs in this novel. Henry Redwood refers to money as "that which gives us all our boasted superiority" over the lower class (II, 15). Caroline steals the evidence of Ellen's parentage because, as she later explains to Ellen, "your fortune would be equal to mine, and that I could not but think very unfair as nearly all papa's fortune came from my mother, and yours, you know, was quite penniless" (II, 267). Caroline's greed contrasts with Ellen's indifference to material things. Ellen is baffled when her society woman friend, Miss Campbell, contemplates renouncing her fiance to avoid forfeiting her inheritance. The loss of the money, Ellen says, "can be of little consequence, since you do not incur the penalty by any violation of duty" (II, 201). Presumably Sedgwick hopes that her readers will emulate the disinterestedness of Ellen Bruce.

Sedgwick raises the questions that would be explored by Henry David Thoreau a generation later, when he would write in Walden: "Most of the luxuries,

and many of the so-called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind. . . . Why has man rooted himself thus firmly in the earth, but that he may rise in the same proportion into the heavens above."<sup>13</sup>

Thoreau's spiritual quest would be manifested in social form in the Brook Farm experiment in communal living, which was organized by the transcendentalist George Ripley, and would last for the first six years of the century's fourth decade. Clearly Sedgwick's novel reflected currents of thought that were central to her era. Her extensive discussion of the Shakers is of considerable historical interest. The relatively classless subculture that was thriving in Sedgwick's day became the one experiment in communal living to survive for two centuries in America. As of December 1983, there were eight surviving Shaker sisters in the United States--three in New Hampshire and five in Maine. One of their number, Eldress Berthe Lindsey, told National Geographic Magazine that "we don't believe in being apart from the world . . . just not a part."<sup>14</sup>

Sedgwick's discussion of the Shakers indicates not only that she pursued knowledge with an open mind. A good historian, she presents both negative and positive aspects. She describes the bizarre rituals

of the Shaker community, and weaves them into a plot that includes the brainwashing of a young girl and a depraved leader, described as having a "form to awaken the suspicions of the most credulous, and confirm the strongest prejudices against a fraternity that would advance such a brother to its highest honours--or, to use their own phrase, to the dead" (I, 95). She depicts a community in which members work for the good of all, while the needs of individuals, such as Emily, are sacrificed.

On the other hand, she paints a sympathetic portrait of a Shaker woman: "her eye beamed with intelligence and tenderness. . . . It was the expression of tender and repressed affections, of disciplined severity, and a sort of melancholy" (I, 90). Sedgwick does not sanction the celibacy of the Shakers, and continually referred to her own single life as a misfortune, as "second best."<sup>15</sup> Emily finds happiness only after she leaves the Shakers and marries James Lenox. But there are some aspects of Shaker society that Sedgwick greatly admires: "the equitable law of their religious republic which requires each individual to 'labour with his hands according to his strength.'" She reports that "The villages of Lebanon and Hancock have been visited by foreigners and strangers from all parts of our

union--all are shocked or disgusted by some of the absurdities of the Shaker faith, but none have withheld their admiration from the results of their industry, order, frugality and temperance" (II, 36).

Although Sedgwick deplored the existence of social injustice in the United States, and disapproval of what she perceived as an emphasis on materialism and outward show in American culture, she emphasizes and occasionally seems to celebrate certain class distinctions. According to Sedgwick, the working class and the middle class each seem to possess positive qualities that the other does not have. Her most admirable characters are the Lenoxes, who are depicted as forthright and practical, but often conspicuously lacking in refinement. Henry Redwood, despite his weakness of character, always knows the correct thing to do. During the ceremony of his wedding to Caroline's mother he betrays his misgivings by stumbling on the altar, but quickly "Recovering his self-possession, he . . . apologised to his wife with the adroit courtesy of a well-bred man." Sedgwick adds that the bride, "with the happy felicity of habitual vanity, not knowing what his emotion meant, believed it meant something flattering to herself" (I, 78). Unaware that Ellen is his daughter, Redwood remarks that "Miss Bruce is so superior to this Lenox

family, so intelligent and cultivated. The Lenoxes," he says, "deserve our respect . . . they are excessively well-informed and clever; but Caroline, you must see the disparity between them and Miss Bruce" (I, 122). Ellen herself seems to make a distinction between herself and the family in whose house she lives. She refuses an offer of marriage from one of the Lenox sons, although he is an admirable and respected clergyman, because "he wanted that delicacy of taste, the result of cultivation" (I, 169). Ellen's gentility is attributed not to the fact that she is a Redwood by birth, but to the influence of a family of distinguished British expatriots, in whose house she had spent most of her childhood. From Mrs. Harrison she had learned French, Italian, drawing, and embroidery, as well as poetry and history. From the Lenoxes she learned domestic skills, so that she was never "in danger of an exclusive taste for the occupations of those who have the privilege of independence and leisure" (I, 155). She received religious training from both the Episcopal Harrisons and the Congregationalist Lenoxes.

The ideal woman, according to Sedgwick, is therefore a synthesis of the gentry and the farm worker. Ellen's upbringing, in the author's words, "was a system of checks and balances that produced

that singular and felicitous union of diversity of qualities which constituted the rare perfection of Ellen's character" (I, 155). Catharine Sedgwick's own background bore a resemblance to that of her fictional character--her father rose to prominence from a family of farmers and tavernkeepers, and her mother was one of the wealthy and distinguished Dwights of Massachusetts. And in her didactic fiction Sedgwick would suggest that children should be educated in a manner similar to that of Ellen Bruce. Ellen is merely a symbol, however, a projection of what the author hoped would evolve in the United States, a moderation of class distinctions, and a great internal unity.

There is a basic difference between Redwood and the British novels of manner that were being written in her day, although they have in common their focus on social interaction. In the works of Jane Austen, the quintessential novelist of manners, the class distinctions are implicit, part of the fabric of the novel. But for Sedgwick they are a topic for discussion and analysis. Ellen Bruce is a conglomeration of qualities that can be enumerated like the ingredients of a recipe. Sedgwick's intention was to portray the America she knew. In the midst of the enthusiasm and the hope so prevalent in

the early years of the United States, she depicted her society with realism and foresight. In the preface to Redwood she writes (x-xi), "we live in a country that is beyond parallel, free, happy, and abundant. As such we would describe it--but no Arcadia, for we have found none." She was aware that internal disharmony could tear the nation apart, that antagonism between classes was fierce, and that patriotism had become sectionalism. In the marriage of Ellen Bruce to Charles Westall can be viewed as a symbolic alliance between South and North, and the resolution Ellen's previously tenuous place in society. But a minor character in Redwood says of Ellen, "sure I am, I never shall look upon her like again" (II, 188).

There is a remarkable passage in the novel that recounts an incident from Redwood's childhood, in which he is told by a dying slave:

"I had no peace. I would have given my life for one moment of freedom. I looked for revenge. I thought of my wife and my little ones; I could have poured out the blood of white men, till it should run like the big waters over which they brought us. But the voice of God pierced my heart and I was an altered man" (I, 56).

We are told that the slave's change of heart had been the result of his religious conversion by a traveling preacher, that he "had converted his just and

unrelenting hatred to forgiveness." Then the slave continues,

"But pray for your father's land and your father's land and your father's children. Pray to be saved from the curse that is coming. Oh!" (he exclaimed) and his voice became stronger, and its deep tones seemed to bear to our ears the sure word of prophecy. "Oh, I hear the cry of revenge; I hear the wailings of your wives and little ones; and I see your fair lands drenched with their blood. Pray to God to save you on that day, for it will surely come" (I, 57).

Sedgwick perceived the greatest threat to the United States in 1824 to be internal conflicts. She suggests Christian forgiveness as the solution, rather than social reform. But as she had promised in her preface, Redwood is not a sermon. Bryant confesses in his review that "we had some apprehensions . . . that the moral would be too anxiously and obtrusively brought forward, and pressed with a wearisome frequency and perseverance. . . . We must say, however, that we see few if any traces of this fault in Redwood. The moral is well wrought into the texture of the work, but never officiously presented."<sup>16</sup>

In The Feminization of American Culture Ann Douglas notes what she refers to as "the fictional takeover of clerical powers by women" in the early nineteenth century. She refers us to the words of

William Ellery Channing, Unitarian minister and close friend of the Sedgwicks. "Woman, if she may not speak in the church, may speak from the printing room, and her touching expositions of religion, not learned in theological institutions, but in the schools of affection, of sorrow, of experience, of domestic charge, sometimes make their way to the heart more surely than the minister's homilies."<sup>17</sup> Catharine Sedgwick certainly hoped to transmit her moral convictions through the medium of her novel, Redwood, but it was not until she devoted herself to didactic fiction that her works fit Channing's description.

Redwood, with all its structural flaws, is a novel that depicts American society in the Federalist period often with luminous clarity. Bryant remarked upon its verisimilitude, describing it as "the portraiture of what passes by our firesides, and in our streets, in the calm of the country and amidst a prosperous and well ordered community. . . . She has come down to the very days in which we live . . . presenting us not merely with the picture of what she has imagined, but with the copy of what she has observed." Bryant called Sedgwick's recreation of everyday life "a hazardous experiment of her powers. . . . We have seen the original, and require that there be no false coloring or distortion of the copy."<sup>18</sup> Catharine

Sedgwick had depicted to Bryant's satisfaction the world they both knew. What he could not foresee is that Redwood, as he described it, anticipated the realistic movement in American fiction by fifty years.

#### Footnotes to Chapter IV

- <sup>1</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Redwood (New York: E. Bliss and E. White, 1824), I, 17-18.
- <sup>2</sup> Redwood II, 216. All further references to this work appear in the text.
- <sup>3</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick, A New-England Tale (New York: E. Bliss and E. White, 1822), xi.
- <sup>4</sup> William Cullen Bryant, "Review of Redwood," North American Review, Apr. 1825, p. 248.
- <sup>5</sup> Edward Halsey Foster, Catharine Maria Sedgwick (New York: Twayne, 1974), p. 64.
- <sup>6</sup> Russel Nye, The Unembarrassed Muse (New York: The Dial Press, 1970), p. 6.
- <sup>7</sup> Foster, p. 57.
- <sup>8</sup> Bryant, pp. 268-69.
- <sup>9</sup> A New-England Tale, iii.
- <sup>10</sup> Bryant, p. 260.
- <sup>11</sup> Foster, p. 58.
- <sup>12</sup> Bryant, p. 271.
- <sup>13</sup> Henry David Thoreau, Walden and Other Writings, ed. Brooks Atkinson (New York: The Modern Library, 1937), p. 14.
- <sup>14</sup> Robert Booth, "Contrary New New Hampshire," National Geographic, Dec. 1982, p. 795.
- <sup>15</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick, "Old Maids," Offerings, ed. Henry William Herbert (New York: Bancroft and Holley, 1834), p. 32.
- <sup>16</sup> Bryant, p. 270.
- <sup>17</sup> Ann Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), pp. 108-9.
- <sup>18</sup> Bryant, pp. 245-46.

## CHAPTER V

### The Lost Children

"I had sons too--and grand-sons; but where are they? . . . they have fallen like our forest trees, before the stroke of the English axe. . . . Sometimes, when the spirits of the storm are howling about my wigwam, I hear the voices of my children crying for vengeance."

. . .

The New-England people have always evinced a fondness for asking advice, which may, perhaps, be explained by the freedom with which it is rejected.<sup>2</sup>

In his critique of Redwood William Cullen Bryant observed that Catharine Sedgwick had

not availed herself of the more obvious and abundant sources of interest, which would naturally suggest themselves to the author of a fictitious history, the scene of which should be laid in the United States. She has not gone back to the infancy of our country, to set before use the fearless and hardy men, who made the first lodgments in its vast forests, . . . the strange land to which they had come, and its unknown dangers, and the savage tribes by whom they were surrounded.

Bryant found much to praise about Redwood, but he adds that "the narrative parts, however,--though always

flowing, and often eloquent, is [sic] not in all places equal to that of the dialogue."<sup>4</sup>

It appears that Sedgwick kept Bryant's assessment of her work in mind as she fashioned her third novel, Hope Leslie, in 1826. She admired the work of the poet whom her family had befriended in 1820, when he and Charles Sedgwick were both practicing law in Great Barrington, Massachusetts.<sup>5</sup> Therefore Bryant is jesting when he refers to Sedgwick in his review as "the writer, who, we understand, is the same lady to whom the public is already indebted for another beautiful work of similar character."<sup>6</sup> Sedgwick is credited with launching Bryant's career as a poet. In 1820 she persuaded him to write five poems for the Unitarian hymnal. These were his first published poems since "Thanatopsis," which was written when he was seventeen.<sup>7</sup> A letter that Sedgwick wrote to her brother Charles indicates her concern for Bryant:

I think it is impossible that in the increasing demand for native literature that a man of his [Bryant's] resources, who had justly the first reputation should not be able to command a competency--He has good sense too--good judgment and moderation. . . He is so modest that everyone seems eager to prove him the merit of which he appears unconscious.

Both the narrative style and the subject matter of Hope Leslie would suggest that Sedgwick carefully

heeded Bryant's criticism. Sedgwick chose a setting from American history, the Springfield colony just after the Pequod Indian War of 1637. Her narrative technique is less derivative of British literary models than that of her previous books. She omits certain conventions of plot structure that, when clumsily handled, had marred her earlier novels--the digressions, ingenuous introductory statements, and heavy-handed moralizing by a ubiquitous narrator. Sedgwick designs a plot that is fast-paced, suspenseful, and engrossing. One character's description of life can be applied to the structure of Hope Leslie: "'What a tragi-comedy is life, Everell!--I am sure your favourite, Shakespear, has copied nature in dividing his scenes between mirth and sadness'" (I, 183). Perhaps Sedgwick presents a less glorified view of Colonial America than the one Bryant imagined would "exalt our national reputation abroad."<sup>9</sup> But Hope Leslie had the ring of truth for large numbers of enthusiastic readers on both sides of the Atlantic. Catharine Sedgwick and her novel were even commemorated in verse by Lydia Howard Huntley Sigourney, "The Sweet Singer of Hartford." Mrs. Sigourney, in Russel Nye's estimation, "dominated the first fifty years of nineteenth, century popular verse, conceding only to Longfellow in popularity."<sup>10</sup>

Jane Benardete calls Mrs. Sigourney "an important index of an era in American taste."<sup>11</sup> Evidently Hope Leslie was sufficiently familiar to Americans for them to recognize in hers. Sigourney's poem, "The Stockbridge Bowl," the allusive to the novel's heroine "Poor Magawisca," and to the novelist, Sedgwick, who "Hath won a fame, whose blossoms rare, / Shall fear no blighting sky."<sup>12</sup> Hope Leslie was not only a popular success; it was Sedgwick's finest achievement, at once a historical novel and a tale of adventure.

The story begins in England in 1636. Sir William Fletcher, who has no male children, has chosen his nephew of the same name to inherit his fortune and title and marry his daughter, Alice. His one stipulation is that his nephew must swear eternal allegiance to the King and the Anglican Church and sever all contact with Puritans--especially with their neighbor, John Winthrop. The younger Fletcher declares his Puritan sympathies and, having sacrificed Alice and his inheritance, sets sail for Boston. Alice attempts to follow him, but Sir William detains her at Southampton and has her married to a Charles Leslie.

Fletcher is disgusted by the intolerance and political corruption in Boston. He joins Pyncheon, Holyoke, and Chapin to found the Springfield frontier

settlement, described as "a few log-houses, planted around a fort, defended by a slight embankment and a palisade" (I, 29). He marries a young orphan in the colony.

Several years later, Alice now widowed and half mad, sets out for the colonies but dies en route. Fletcher adopts her two daughters, who are accompanied by their tutor and their aunt, Mrs. Grafton. Upon their arrival in the colonies, the girls, Alice and Mary, are baptised with the names Hope and Faith by Reverend Cotton. Hope is detained, and Fletcher sets out to meet her, leaving his wife and children in the care of his oldest son, Everell, and the servants, who include two captive Pequod Indians named Oneco and Magawisca.

The Pequods descend upon the Fletcher homestead to rescue the captives and avenge those who had died in the Pequod War. Fletcher's wife is stabbed to death by a Mohawk brave who tears the baby from her arms and "dashes him on the door stone" (I, 109), before Chief Mononotto can intervene. Faith and Everell are taken captive. As Everell is about to be executed, Magawisca deflects the tomohawk and her arm is severed. Everell escapes.

Seven year later, Faith is still with the Indians. Hope is staying at Governor Winthrop's

mansion in Boston. Everell has just returned from the university in England, and is secretly in love with Hope. Hope's friend Esther is in love with Everell. Hope is courted by the historian, William Hubbard, and by a handsome profiteer, Sir Philip Gardiner. She is diverted by Sir Philip until his page reveals to Hope that she is a woman in disguise. Magawisca visits Hope at the Governor's mansion, under the pretext of selling mocassins. She arranges a reunion with Faith, because the Chief believes this gesture will improve relations with the colonists. At the meeting Faith communicates to Hope her love for her husband, Oneco, and her wish to stay with the Indians.

Sir Philip, having learned of the reunion, informs the governor in the hope of gaining favor. The governor's guards ambush and capture Faith and Magawisca, whereupon Oneco takes Hope hostage. When the canoe capsizes in Boston Harbor during a thunderstorm, Hope makes her escape. She is then pursued by a band of drunken sailors but eludes them in a rowboat. Hope contracts a fever and is nursed back to health by Esther.

Magawisca is accused of being an accomplice in the murder of Fletcher's wife and child. Sir Philip visits Magawisca in prison, offering his female page as a present for Oneco, should Magawisca help him gain

the Indians' sympathies. He also visits Morton of Merrymount, now old and crazed, who pulls him into his cell and throws the key out the window. Sir Philip's screams thwart Everell's attempt to rescue Magawisca. Philip then decides to win the confidence of the Puritans; so he testifies against Magawisca and accuses her not only of conspiracy, but of witchcraft. Magawisca stands trial in the Puritan court after refusing to repent and convert to Calvinism. She defends herself by citing the many kindnesses of Indians to British settlers and observes that the Lord's chosen people are supposed to convert the heathens, and not exterminate them. When the remainder of the trial is postponed for a month, Magawisca declares that she would rather die than be imprisoned further. Everell and Hope independently predict that Magawisca will not be found innocent in the Puritan court, and they each resolve to rescue her. Everell asks Esther Downing, now his fiancee, to aid him. She refuses to break the law, even for a just cause. Everell is disappointed in Esther, but he feels duty bound to continue their engagement. Hope arranges for Magawisca's escape from jail by having her tutor exchange clothing and places with the Indian woman. Meanwhile, Sir Philip has designs on Hope's wealth and title; he wants to marry her and take her

back to England. Sir Philip hires a pirate band to kidnap Hope, but they abduct one of her servants in error and take her on shipboard. Sir Philip's desperate female page deliberately ignites the ship by throwing a lamp into a keg of gunpowder. The ship and its passengers explode in Boston Harbor. Hope is pardoned for aiding Magawisca's escape. Faith returns to her husband and his people. Everell and Hope declare their love for one another. Magawisca, like the few other surviving Pequods, disappears into the wilderness.

Redwood had a fascinating but predictable plot; Hope Leslie keeps the reader guessing. Sedgwick creates suspense through two very different methods: some events are foreshadowed, but others catch the reader by surprise. Intuition warns the Indian woman, and, in turn, the audience is primed for the English ambush of the Pequod settlement. "The warning spirit, that ever keeps its station at a mother's pillow, whispered that some evil was near" (I, 80). Mrs. Fletcher has a similar premonition just prior to the Indians' reprisal. She writes to her husband, "fearful thoughts press on me-- . . . our reunion may be far distant, and if it should never chance in this world, oh remember that if I have fallen far short in duty, the measure of my love has been full!" (I, 60).

That same day an old Indian woman stares fixedly at Mrs. Fletcher's infant and says, "The baby is like a flower just opened to the sun, with no stains upon it--that he better pass now to the Great Spirit. . . . This world is all a rough place--all sharp stone, and deep water, and black clouds" (II, 63).

Sedgwick had learned the dramatic effectiveness of lulling her readers into false security before presenting a harrowing scene. An old man reassures the Indian mother: "your boy sleep safely, . . . and I have listened to the idle fear of a doating mother." But the woman senses the presence of the enemy. "I come not of a fearful race," she insists (I, 81). The ominous mood is dispelled for a time. Sedgwick paints an idyllic, brightly lit domestic scene in the Fletcher's formal English garden, beside the wilderness. It is at this point that the Indians' violent counterattack takes place.

Many of the novel's most suspenseful episodes are about characters eluding captors: Everell escapes from the Pequods, Faith and Magawisca from the Puritans, Hope from the Pequods, Sir Philip, drunken sailors, and pirates. The escape motif does not seem repetitious but as absorbing to the reader as the chase scenes are intriguing to the viewer of a modern action film.

The resolution of the love story in Hope Leslie is far less predictable than the alliances that are the culmination of the two earlier novels. The marriage of the Quaker to Jane Elton is inevitable from the first pages of A New-England Tale, and in Redwood Westall is only briefly diverted by Ellen Bruce's rival. But Hope is less certain of her love for the hero than were the heroines of the earlier novels. Furthermore, Magawisca and Esther Downing are both in love with Everell, and he loves the former and proposes to the latter.

Only one episode seems contrived merely for the purpose of heightening the suspense, and that is Hope's visit to the graveyard to learn from Magawisca of Faith's whereabouts. Magawisca could have conveyed the news of Faith on the occasion when she agrees to meet her at the graveyard. In A New-England Tale the graveyard had been a plausible stopping place for Crazy Bet, but the setting serve no purpose in Hope Leslie except to inject a gothic touch. This is also the only section of the book in which the time sequence is rearranged: The heroine leaves the Winthrop house, she returns, we are told that the household had been alarmed, and at last the nature of Hope's errand is revealed. The effect upon the reader is more likely to be impatience than curiosity.

But this is the only major instance of a reversion to the stylistic flaws that weakened the earlier novels; the plot of Hope Leslie is skillfully constructed. Sedgwick had mastered the story-teller's art by her third attempt at fiction. The dramatic climax of the book, the explosion of Sir Philip's ship in Boston Harbor, is preceded by an eerie scene that is a fine specimen of gothic writing. A frightened Sir Philip is standing on the deck. To his "disordered imagination the heavy mist seemed like an unfolding" shroud. There was a voice of sullen menace in the dashing of the waves against the vessel--The hooting of the night-bird was ominous--and Rosa's low sobs, and the horrid oaths of the misruled crew, rising in his ears like evil prophecies" (II, 246).

Sedgwick risked censure when she included the marriage of Faith and Oneco, and the childhood romance of Magawisca and Everell. Foster points out that Sedgwick's contemporary, Cooper, kills off Cora in The Last of the Mohecans, just before her marriage to an Indian, which D.H. Lawrence in Studies in American Literature (1923) interpreted as evidence of Cooper's opposition to miscengenation.<sup>14</sup> Lawrence does not discuss Sedgwick's work, but her Faith Leslie is happily married, calls herself Mary, rather than the name given her by the Puritans, and she has no desire

to leave the Indians. When she is reunited with Hope, Faith arrives "in her savage attire" in a canoe, with Oneco "fondly leaning on his wife's shoulder." Hope pleads at great length with her sister to return to Boston. "'No speak Yongees,' replied Mary, exhausting in this brief sentence, all the English she could command" (II, 27). Faith's anguish when she is returned to the colony by force is observed by one of the Puritans: "All day, and all night . . . she goes from window to window, like an imprisoned bird fluttering against the bars of its cage, and so wistfully she looks abroad, as if her heart went forth with the glance of her eye" (II, 153).

Tales of capture by Indians were a firmly established part of the American literary tradition when Hope Leslie was written, and these books were virtually guaranteed a reading market. Russel Nye calls the five hundred stories about Indian captivity that were published in the colonial period "the first authentically popular American novels." But in Catharine Sedgwick's hands the theme is turned into a social statement as well as a tale of adventure.

Hope's discovery that her sister is married to an Indian is one of the book's most powerful scenes. Hope's dismay is matched by Magawisca's disdain: "God forbid!" is Hope's reaction to the news. Magawisca

responds "with a look of proud contempt that showed she reciprocated with full measure, the scorn expressed for her race. 'Yes--an Indian, in whose veins runs the blood of the strongest, the fleetest of the children of the forest, who never turned their backs on friends or enemies, and whose souls have returned to the Great Spirit, stainless as they came from him. Think ye that your blood will be corrupted by mingling with this strain?'" (II, 27).

Sedgwick's inclusion of the Indians' point of view reflected her sympathy for all downtrodden people. But she was aware from the beginning of her literary career that sensationalism was marketable. A New-England Tale had owed some of its popularity to its discussion of dueling, gambling, and impious churchgoers. In Hope Leslie Sedgwick carefully supplied some important ingredients of the popular novel, controversial issues, suspense, and bloodshed.

Never would Catharine Sedgwick equal the scenes of graphic violence to be found in her third novel. Perhaps the most intensely dramatic and gruesome episode is Magawisca's intervention in the execution of Everell by her tomohawk-wielding father: "The chief raised the deadly weapon, when Magawisca, springing from the precipice, screamed--'Forbear!' and interposed her arm. It was too late. The blow was

leveled--force and direction given. The stroke aimed at Everell's neck, severed his defender's arm, and left him unharmed. The lopped, quivering member dropped over the precipice" (I, 157). Magawisca's father faints. This unexpected disfigurement of a central character brings to mind the Victorian hero, Rochester, in Charlotte Bronte's Jane Eyre. Horror and sentimentality are mingled when he loses his hand in a vain attempt to save his mad wife. Magawisca's disability is symbolic of the plight of the Indians, weakened by internal disputes, never to be whole again. So famous was the episode to readers of popular fiction that Laurel Hill, the location that served as the model for "sacrifice hill," was written up in Massachusetts guidebooks a generation later.<sup>16</sup>

Another interesting aspect of the book is the presence of Sedgwick's first genuine villain, Sir Philip Gardiner. The Wilsons in A New-England Tale were dishonest, and the Shaker, Harrington, in Redwood was disreputable, but Sir Philip is more memorable and more fully sketched out than these characters.

Sedgwick describes him as approximately thirty-five,

possibly not so much; but his face was deeply marked by the ravages of the passions, or perhaps the stirring scenes of life. His eyes were black and piercing, set

near together, and overhung by thick black brows, whose incessant motion indicated a restless mind. The concentration of thought or the designing purpose, expressed by the upper part of his face, was contradicted by his loose, open flexible lips. His complexion had the same puzzling contrariety--it was dark and saturnine, but enlivened with the ruddy hue of the bon-vivant" (I, 204).

The ambiguous quality about his appearance mirrors the duplicity that makes him alarmingly evil. He pretends to be a Puritan because it is profitable to him. On one occasion he confides with rare candor that he had left England because "I was tired of playing a losing game; even rats, you know, have an instinct by which they flee a falling house" (II, 42). Sedgwick writes: "The stranger's apparel was elaborately puritanical--still there was a certain elegance about it. His garments were of the finest materials, and exactly fitted to a form of manly symmetry" (II, 205). Sir Philip's overpowering sensuality contrasts with the asexual heroes of Sedgwick's novels, whose appearance is never described. Everell is typical of her heroes, for "he had cherished for Hope a consecrating sentiment--he had invested her with a sacredness which the most elevated love throws around the object of its devotion" (II, 10). Sir Philip, on the other hand, is attracted to Hope because she appears to be so approachable: "I detest a woman like

a walled city, that can never be approached without your being reminded that she is inaccessible--a woman whose measured premeditated words sound always like the sentinel cry, 'all is well!'" (II, 48, 49). Sir Philip attempts to seduce Hope, and later abducts her, declaring it a pity "that youth and beauty should be thrown away upon these drivelling, canting, preaching, praying, liberty-loving, lecture-going pilgrims!" (II, 45).

Although he is one of the most vital of Sedgwick's male characters, there is a suggestion of the supernatural about him. He is referred to as "the stranger" a euphemism for the devil (II, 205) and he is likened to one of the fallen angels in Paradise Lost, (II, 52). When the captain of the pirate ship asks him his destination, he says he is going to hell, like the "demon lover" in the English broadside ballad who abducts his mortal lover and then sinks the ship they are traveling on.<sup>17</sup> We are told that the Puritans speak of Sir Philip as a devil's agent. Sedgwick recreates an age of superstition through these references to the devil, through the characters' reliance on dreams and omens, and through the accusations of witchcraft leveled against Magawisca and another woman. Edward Foster tells us that Sir Philip is based upon a real-life profiteer, Sir Christopher Gardiner, who was also a bigamist.<sup>18</sup> Many of the

minor characters are also historical figures: Governor Winthrop, Chief Mononotto, and the aged Morton of Merrymount, crazed and ragged in his prison cell. Another character, William Hubbard, was the author of Narrative of the Indian Wars. Hubbard calls upon Hope, but she rejects him, because "she inclineth not to bookish men and is apt to vent her childish gaiety upon the ungainly ways of scholars." The narrator comments that "our heroine, by her peculiar taste, lost at least the golden opportunity of illustrating herself by a union with the future historian of New-England" (I, 255). Fletcher's letters to his wife in Hope Leslie bear a resemblance to the letters of Winthrop and his wife, Margaret, first published in 1790. Margaret Winthrop wrote to her husband in 1628:

How dearly welcome thy kind letter was to me, I am not able to express. The sweetness of it did much refresh me. What can be more pleasing to a wife than to hear of the welfare of her best beloved, and how he is pleased with her poor endeavor! I blush to hear myself commended, knowing my own wants.

Compare this with Mrs. Fletcher's letter to her husband in Hope Leslie:

I thank thee heartily, my dear life, that thou dost so warmly commend my poor endeavors to do well in thy absence. . . . Yet my anxious thoughts have been more with thee than with myself (I, 52).

The narrator comments that Mrs. Fletcher defers to her husband "as all wives of that age of undisputed masculine supremacy (or most of those of our less passive age would do), with meek submission" (I, 28). Catharine Sedgwick's mother wrote letters in the same vein as the Puritan women of fiction and history. Seth Curtis Beach, in Daughters of the Puritans (1905), cites a letter in which Pamela Sedgwick urges her husband to give up his political career and return home from Washington. A dutiful wife, she knows that she must acquiesce to his decision and concludes: "Submission is my duty, and however hard, I will try to practice what reason teaches me I am under obligation to do."<sup>20</sup> Mrs. Sedgwick, like Mrs. Winthrop and the fictional Mrs. Fletcher, was not her husband's first love. We have mentioned that Theodore Sedgwick cherished the memory of his bride who died of smallpox. In Hope Leslie, Fletcher tells his wife about Alice, and lets her understand "frankly, that the affection I gave to her could not be transferred to another." And Winthrop, according to Sedgwick, "had been long married and twice married--and probably a little dimness had come over his recollection of the enthusiasm of a first passion" (I, 20). Thus Sedgwick weaves her personal experiences into her interpretation of an era and gives history a human touch.

Despite his austere quality, Winthrop, according to Sedgwick, "is well known to have been a man of the most tender domestic affections and sympathies" (I, 20). He possessed what the author terms "the rare virtue of disinterested patriotism" (II, 238). She describes him as a tall man with mild blue eyes and a high forehead, and adds that "on the whole, we must confess, the external man presents the solemn and forbidding aspect of the times in which he flourished" (I, 238). Winthrop is the ideal Puritan, and also Sedgwick's paradigm for the Puritan husband. The Winthrop's marriage is characterized by "unqualified obedience from the wife to the husband, her appointed lord and master . . . which our pious father's or even mothers, were so far from questioning that the only divine right to govern which they acknowledged, was that vested in the husband over the wife" (I, 239). Sedgwick's wry wit surfaces when she writes: "The Governor was in the habit of participating with his wife his most secret state-affairs; moved to this confidence, no doubt by his strict views of her rights as his help-mate, for it cannot be supposed, even for a moment, that one of the superior sex should find pleasure in telling a secret" (II, 54).

Nathaniel Ward is not a character in Hope Leslie, but his book figures as prominently in the novel as

Winthrop's writings. Ward was the preacher and legislator in the a settlement adjacent to the Springfield Colony in the 1830s. In The Simple Cobbler of Aggawam he viciously denounced what he thought to be the degeneracy of his society, manifested most notably in women's attire. Catharine Sedgwick satirizes Ward's book by personifying the qualities he detested in one of Hope Leslie most delightful characters, Hope's aunt, Mrs. Grafton, who emigrates with Hope and Faith, is "unhappily for herself as her lot was cast, a zealous adherent to the Church of England" (I, 47). Mrs. Grafton's reply to those who disapprove of her is that "a faith and mode of religion that had saved so many was good enough to save her" moreover, "she had received her belief, just as it was, from her father, and that he, nor she, was responsible for it" (I, 47). Mrs. Grafton's main interest in life is fashionable clothing' she tell her niece:

"It is every woman's duty, upon all occasions, to look as well as she can."

"And a duty so faithfully performed, my dear aunt," said Hope, "that I fancy, like other duties, it becomes easy from habit."

"Easy," replied Mrs. Grafton, with perfect naivete, "second nature, my dear--second nature. I was taught from a child to determine the first thing in the morning, what I should wear that day; and now it is as natural to me as to open my eyes when I awake!" (I, 243).

Catharine Sedgwick was herself very interested in fashions; in her letters can be found discussions of fabrics, lace edgings, and styles in the evening capes.<sup>21</sup> The character therefore seems to reflect the author's opinion that "Dress and ornaments . . . are the most likely things in the world to take the mind off from trouble." Mrs. Grafton adds that "Till I came to this New English colony, where every thing seems, as it were, topsy turvy, I never saw that woman whose mind could not be diverted by dress and ornaments" (II, 156).

Sedgwick quotes directly from The Simple Cobbler of Aggawam, and furnishes Mrs. Grafton with a rejoinder. Cited is Ward's coarse reference to the "nugiperous gentle dames who enquired what dress the Queen is in this week" (I, 48). Sedgwick does not supply the remainder of this passage from Ward:

But when I hear a nugiperous gentle dame inquire what dress the Queen is in this week, what the nudistriian fashion of the court, with edge to be in it in all haste, whatever it be; I look at her as the very gizzard of trifle, the product of a quarter of a cipher, the epitome of nothing, fitter to be kicked, if she were a kickable substance, than either honoured or humored."<sup>22</sup>

The unperturbed Mrs. Grafton counters Ward's stance with the reply that the Puritans "did most unnaturally

believe their nature as women, and their birth and bringing-up as gentlewomen" (I, 48). Mrs. Grafton serenely weathers frontier hardships and an Indian raid, albeit comforted by her bandbox and a "rainbow necklace" of the appropriate colors and arrangement of semi-precious stones. Sedgwick seems to refer to Ward when she writes of "Good people who take upon themselves the super-censorship of their neighbors consciences" (I, 47). She quotes out of context the cobbler's statement that when he sees stylish women, "I cannot cleanse my phansie of them for a month after" (I, 49).

One other minor character is noteworthy. Barnaby Tuttle is the Springfield jailor; he has a remarkable Dickensian quality--although Charles Dickens was only fifteen when Hope Leslie was published. When Hope visits Magawisca in prison, Barnaby asks her to join him in his "family exercise" of singing an interminable hymn of "twelve stanzas of long and very irregular metre, which he, obligingly, gave out, line by line" (II, 220-221). Barnaby Tuttle explains that he is a widower and that his daughter, Ruthy, lives in another settlement. His topic of conversation keeps returning to Ruthy, her resemblance to him, and her skill at writing letters. "Ruthy is quite handy with her pen--takes after the Tuttles in that: you know,

Miss Leslie, my great-grandfather wrote a book" (II, 221). Hope charms Barnaby into letting her see Magawisca without a permit by declaring she will never ask another favor of him, and by bursting into tears. Hope also persuades the tutor, Mr. Cradock, to wear Magawisca's clothing and to take her place in jail. She simply holds his hand and Cradock consents, saying, Miss Hope Leslie, ye have perverted the simple-minded" (II, 227). In this superbly funny scene, Hope fusses with the disguise while she distracts Barnaby Tuttle with chatter about Ruthy.

Hope is not Sedgwick's most exemplary heroine; she lacks the sincerity of Jane Elton and the awesome perfection of Ellen Bruce. Nor is she the most extraordinary, for that distinction probably belongs to Grace Herbert in Married or Single? Hope is too mercurial to be as memorable as Caroline Redwood. The "head-strong" Hope (I, 86) departs from the Puritan stereotype, represented in Hope Leslie by the soft-spoken, law-abiding Esther Downing. We have noted the author's interest in the origins of her characters' traits. She explains that "A favourite from birth, Hope had been accustomed to the gratification of her wishes" by her preoccupied father and her indulgent aunt (II, 168). Topographical imagery is used to describe Hope. She is compared by

the narrator to "a mountain rill . . . leaping over rocks and precipices, sportive, free, and beautiful" (I, 200). Fletcher says that "Hope is of a feeling make: She often reminds me of the Delta lands, where the fruits spring forth before the waters have retired. Smiles are playing on her lips before the tear is dry on her cheek" (I, 264). According to Sir Philip, she "has a generous rashness, a thoughtless impetuosity, a fearlessness of the sanctimonious dictators that surround her, and a noble contempt of danger that stimulates me, at least, to love and enterprise" (II, 49). The truth is that Hope is manipulative and charming--and extremely lifelike. She has neither the ideals of Hawthorne's Hester Prinn nor the uncorrupted amorality of Pearl. Hope's rescue of Magawisca is less an act of conscience than daring, of "rashly following her first generous impulses" (II, 72). When Everell seems to favor Esther, Hope is crushed, but quickly she has "rallied her spirits," and "was mentally resolving to act most heroically is expel every selfless feeling from her heart, and to live for the happiness of others" (II, 67). Hope is a believable character, not because, as Foster suggests, she is the synthesis of the best qualities of Jane and Ellen, and "the characterization of the thoroughly virtuous woman."<sup>23</sup> Hope seems human because of her

imperfections. When Everell and Esther announce their engagement, we find Hope "exulting in her victory over herself, and endeavoring to regain in solitude the tranquility which she was surprised to find had utterly forsaken her" (II, 72).

Hope cannot be said to be heroic, but she is repeatedly referred to as "our heroine" in scenes where she and Magawisca both appear, as if the Indian woman might otherwise be mistaken for the central character. Magawisca is an impressive figure. Her costume is meticulously described. Her braided hair is "attached at equal distances by rings of polished bone. She wore a waistcoat of deerskin, fastened at the throat by a richly wrought collar. . . . A mantle of purple cloth . . . and her strait (sic) short petticoat or kilt of the same rare costly material, had been obtained, probably from the English traders." She has "an air of wild and fantastic grace," but we are assured that "her face, although marked by the peculiarities of her race, was beautiful even to a European eye" (I, 40).

Magawisca is the catalyst for the novel's action, and the vehicle by which Sedgwick introduces her major themes. Magawisca saves Everell from death and arranged the temporary reunion of Hope and Faith. Her trial and escape are among the novel's most dramatic

episodes. She is center stage during the greater part of the novel, and she relates the events of the Pequod War that are the background of the story. She voices the author's often repeated comment on the disparity between Christian doctrine and practice. And she introduces the novel's recurring theme of retribution. She says, "We cannot take as a gift that which is own own--The law of vengeance is written on our hearts. . . . You say you have a written rule of forgiveness--it may be better if you would be guided by it" (II, 260). Vengeance motivates most of the novel's central events: The massacre of the Pequods sparks the killing of Mrs. Fletcher and her baby, the trial of Magawisca, the capture of Hope by Oneco, the destruction of the pirate ship by Sir Philip's spurned female page. Magawisca articulates what Sedgwick sees as the plight of the Indian: "I am your enemy; the sunbeam and the shadow cannot mingle . . . Can we grasp in friendship the hand raised to strike us?" (I, 86-87). Although she is not the heroine, Magawisca is the novel's central character.

Foster writes that "It was probably Timothy Flint who reviewed Hope Leslie for the Western Monthly Review and criticized the character of Magawisca for being 'the first genuine Indian angel.' 'This angel, as she stands,' wrote Flint, 'is a very pretty fancy;

but no more like a squaw, than the croaking of a sandhill-crane is like the sweet, clear full note of the redbird. Dealers in fiction have privileges; but they ought to have for foundations, some slight resemblance to nature."<sup>24</sup> It is unlikely that the critic in The Western Monthly Review would have found fault with Sedgwick's flattering portrait had the character not been an Indian. Traditional heroines in novels are routinely idealized. Bryant, in his review of Redwood had no quarrel with the depiction of Ellen Bruce, who he calls "a beautiful vision of feminine sweetness, loveliness, and rectitude of heart and understanding."<sup>25</sup> Foster is of the opinion that

Flint's characterization of Magawisca is a fitting one, but he failed to realize that the idealization of the Pequod maiden was quite intentional. Miss Sedgwick never intended her to be seen as one of Timothy Flint's realistic squaws; Magawisca is a "noble savage." She is, in fact, a Christian without the training of Christianity. She is good not because civilization has taught her to be so, but because her nature is to charitable and kind . . . She remains a child of the forest--although surely no ordinary Indian squaw."<sup>26</sup>

Foster refers repeatedly to Magawisca with Rousseau's oxymoron, "noble savage." He misreads the character as much as "Flint" does. Magawisca is no more idealized than Jane Elton or Ellen Bruce, and less stylized than Esther Downing or the fashionable

Miss Campbell in Redwood. Sedgwick intended the mutilated Indian woman in Hope Leslie to be a symbol of her race. Her injury, unintentionally inflicted by her father, mirrors the particular circumstances of the Pequod War, in which disunity resulted in the eventual dismembering of the entire tribe.

Magawisca's imprisonment at the hands of the Puritans and their unsuccessful attempt to convert her to their faith, typify the relationship between the Indians and the colonists.

Yet Magawisca is more than a symbolic representation of a people. She is a well-drawn character whose inner conflicts are revealed and ultimately resolved by her return to the wilderness. She is torn between her affection for the Fletcher family and her loyalty to her father's tribe who avenge their dead by killing Mrs. Fletcher and her baby. She saves Everell's life at great personal cost, but she acknowledges that there are social forces beyond her control--the inevitability of her subjugation should she remain within the colonial settlement and the hopelessness of her love for Everell. Everell has said of Magawisca, "I might have loved her--might have forgotten that nature had put barriers between us" (II, 69).

For the seventeenth century Indian there was still the Western frontier. Magawisca says, "My

people have gone to the isles of the sweet South-West; to those shores that the bark of an evening can never touch; Think ye I fear to follow them?" (II, 189).

She ultimately rejects the Puritan community in affirmation of her Indian heritage and her religion, which is not "Christian without the training of Christianity," as Foster suggests;<sup>27</sup> it is pantheism. As she departs for the wilderness, Magawisca declares, "There is no solitude to me; the Great Spirit, and his ministers, are every where present and visible to the eye of the soul that loves him; nature is but his interpreter; her forms are but bodies for the Spirit. I hear him in the rushing winds--in the softly moving streams. I see him in the bursting life of spring--in the ripening maize--in the falling leaf" (II, 263). These words predate Emerson by more than a decade.

Sedgwick introduces a virtuous and courageous Indian woman to her readers at a time when Indians were more frequently portrayed as brutal infidels than as "noble savages," and seldom depicted as believable human beings. Lydia Maria Francis Child had been sympathetic to Indians in her fanciful novel, Hobomok (1824). And Cooper's The Last of the Moheicans (1826) had appeared just a year before Hope Leslie and had also dealt with the Pequod War. But Cooper focuses on a Pequod deserter who became an English ally.

Sedgwick does not dispute the facts about the war, but through Magawisca she offers her readers a very different presentation of the events. In Hope Leslie Magawisca tells Everell her recollections of the colonists' attack on the Indian settlement: "The enemy . . . had surrounded the palisade, and opened their fire . . . on sleeping women and children" (I, 81). She recalls "Those fearful guns that we had never heard before . . . the piteous cries of the little children--the groans of our mothers, and oh! worse--worse than all--the silence of those who could not speak" (I, 83).

She describes the destruction of the village:

Then was taken from our hearth-stone, where the English had been so often warmed and cherished, the brand to consume our dwellings. They were covered with mats, and burnt like dried straw. . . . Some of our people threw themselves into the midst of the crackling flames, and their courageous souls departed with one shout of triumph; others mounted the palisade, but they were shot and dropped like a flock of birds smitten by the hunter's arrow. Thus did the strangers destroy, in our own homes, hundreds of our tribe (I, 84).

Magawisca is overwhelmed by her memories, and says, "Spirit of my mother! . . . Oh! that I could follow thee to that blessed land where I should no more dread the war-cry, nor the death knife (I, 85).

Governor Winthrop recorded The Battle of Mystic' in his journals. In June of 1637,

Our English from Connecticut with their Indians and many of the Naragansetts, marched in the night to a fort of the Pequots at Mystic, and after two hours' fight, they took it (by firing it) and slew two chief sachems and one hundred and fifty fighting men, and about a hundred fifty old men, women and children with the loss of two English. Only one killed by the enemy . . . The general defeat by the Pequots happened the day after our fast.<sup>28</sup>

The modern Indian historian, William Brandon, summarizes the events of the 1637 war: "The English army (240 colonists; 1,000 Naragansetts; 70 Mohegans) made a stealthy night attack on a stockaded Pequot town near the Mystic River in Connecticut, burned the town, and slaughtered its 600 inhabitants." Brandon mentions the other major event, "the surrender of a crowd of Pequots trapped in a swamp; the adult male captives were killed, boys sold to the West Indies, woman and girls parceled out among the colonists as slaves."<sup>29</sup> Brandon's account is consistent with Governor Winthrop's journal entry:

When it was near morning, it grew dark, so as such of them as were left, crept out. One escaped. . . . Here our men got some booty of kettles, ? wam pom, etc., and the women and children were divided, and sent, some to Connecticut, some to Massachusetts. . . . We had now slain and taken 700. We sent 15 of the boys and two women to Bermuda by Pierce.<sup>30</sup>

Brandon adds that although the Pequods were the most powerful Indians in the Massachusetts area they had made no attacks on colonial settlements prior to the British attack in 1637.

Sedgwick's version of the Pequod War is innovative. It encourages popular sympathy for the Indians by leading her readers to identify with their universal human qualities--a daughter's anguish at her mother's death, a mother's fear for her child's safety. In addition, the author suggests that the Indians' behavior was frequently misconstrued.

When made captives, they courted death, and exulted in torture. These traits of their character will be viewed by an impartial observer, in a light very different from that in which they were regarded by our ancestors. In our histories, it was perhaps natural that they should be represented as "surly dogs," who preferred to die rather than live, from no other motive than a stupid or malignant obstinacy. Their own historians or poets, if they had such, would as naturally, and with more justice, have extolled their high-souled courage and patriotism (vi).

It should be emphasized that Hope Leslie is not slanted to favor only the Indians. Sedgwick aimed for historical objectivity; she encourages her readers to be open minded. The suffering of the settlers at the hands of the Indians is not omitted from the narrative. She writes that in the 1640s terrible

massacres were perpetuated on the English settlements in Virginia; the Dutch establishments in New-York were involved, and rumors of secret and brooding hostility kept the colonies of New-England in a state of perpetual alarm" (II, 38). They are not "noble savages" who stab Mrs. Fletcher, tear her infant from her and smash him on the doorstep. Sedgwick comments that "such events, as we have feebly related, were common in our early annals, and attended by horrors that it would be impossible for the imagination to exaggerate. Not only families, but villages, were cut off by most dreaded of all foes--the ruthless, vengeful savage" (I, 121).

Sedgwick had learned about the Indians first-hand in her native Stockbridge. We have mentioned earlier that Indian raids were vividly recalled by her mother's generation. Sedgwick's own interest in Indians is reflected in the local legends she recorded in her diary. "An aged squaw" told her in 1821 about the spirit of a young girl who haunted Monument Mountain, where she took her life after being molested by her cousin. In her journal Sedgwick copied an Indian proverb which asserts "that the G. Spirit gave the W. man a plough & the red man a bow & arrow" and "a common saying that an Indian can't work--'Men were

made for war & hunting--squaws & hedge hogs to scratch the ground.'"<sup>32</sup>

While visiting Utica, New York, in 1821, Sedgwick heard the life story of one of the townspeople, and she confides that it "awakened my love of the romantic." Thirty years before, a French nobleman, driven to America by the Revolution, had been nursed through an illness of many months by the Oneidas, particularly a young girl skilled at herbal remedies. "He gave to her all he had to give for she had already taken his heart, his hand." He worked the land that was his wife's dowry and made it into a profitable farm. He recovered some of his property in France when the Bourbons were restored to power, and his son and two daughters were educated in Europe.<sup>33</sup>

But it was an event taken from the Sedgwicks' own family history that served as the inspiration for Hope Leslie. Faith's capture and adoption by the Indians is modeled on the life of Catharine Sedgwick's ancestor, Eunice Williams. During Sedgwick's 1821 visit to Utica, she made a journal entry recording her meeting with a Mr. Williams, who was "descended from a daughter of a Parson Williams of Deerfield. She was taken by the savages during one of their incursions into the newly-formed settlement of our pious ancestors. Many years after . . . her friends made a

fruitless effort to recover her. She had married an Indian, and chosen his country for her country, and his God for her God."<sup>34</sup> Sedgwick's great grandfather, Ephraim Williams was the first cousin of Eunice's father, John Williams. His book, The Redeemed Captive Returning to Zion (1707) is one of the best known of the Indian captivity stories.

Sedgwick's connection with Eunice Williams undoubtedly influenced her treatment of the subject matter, but many other Americans also counted Indians among their ancestors and did not share her sympathies. We have mentioned Sedgwick's concern about minorities and her confessed "love of the romantic." Most significant was her willingness to be open-minded in her study of seventeenth-century American history. Although the United States was still in its infancy, the events of the colonial period had already been obscured by a haze of picturesque fantasy. Catharine Sedgwick was prepared to question prevailing notions about the British settlers as well as the Pequods. Sedgwick's interpretations of history are sometimes simplistic; she threatens to create new myths in the process of discrediting old ones. Yet she clarifies certain popular misconceptions about the colonial period and invites her readers to take a closer look at history.

"The first settlers of New-England were not illiterate," she writes in Hope Leslie, "but learned and industrious men. They seem to have understood the importance of their station. The Massachusetts colony, and some of the other establishments sparsely scattered on the coast, were illuminated spots, clear and bright lights, set in the borders of a dark and turbulent wilderness" (v). Her view of the Puritans contrast with that of Nathaniel Hawthorne, who said their prayers before daylight, and then wrought in the forests or the cornfield until evening made it prayer time again. When they met in conclave, it was never to keep up the old English mirth, but to hear sermons three hours long, or to proclaim bounties on the heads of wolves and the scalps of Indians. Their festivals were fast days and their chief pastime the singing of psalms." Hawthorne writes that when the Puritans gained sovereignty, "then would their spirits darken all the clime, and make it a land of clouded visages, of hard toil, of sermon and psalm forever."<sup>35</sup>

Catharine Sedgwick expresses a more moderate view: "The magnitude of the enterprise in which the first settlers of New England were engaged, the terrific obstacles they encountered, and the hardships they endured, gave their characters a seriousness and solemnity, heightened, as it may be, by the severity

of their religious faith (I, 26). She writes indulgently for the Puritan Sabbath which began on Saturday night, "at which time all temporal affairs were suspended; and so zealously did our fathers maintain the letter, as well as the spirit of the law, that, according to the vulgar tradition in Connecticut, no beer was brewed in the latter part of the week, lest it should presume to work on Sunday" (I, 259).

The lengthy description of Governor Winthrop's Boston mansion is evidently included to correct a misconception about the austerity of the Puritans' lifestyle. The house has mirrored halls, red leather upholstered chairs, elaborate drapes, a clock and andirons of brass, and silver serving vessels. Sedgwick reminds her contemporaries: "These pilgrims were not needy adventurers, nor ruined exiles. Mr. Winthrop himself had an estate in England, worth seven hundred pounds per annum" (I, 237).

Sedgwick also challenges the myth of the colonies as haven of religious toleration. She notes that power in religious settlements was "sometimes perverted to the purposes of oppression and personal aggrandizement" (I, 27). When the fictional Puritan, Fletcher, arrived in the New World, "He was shocked

when a religious republic, which he fancied to be founded on the basis of established truth, was disturbed by the out-break of heresies; and his heart sickened when he saw those, who had sacrificed whatever man holds dearest to religious freedom, imposing those shackles on others from which they had just released themselves at such a price" (I, 27). The discrepancy between morality and government is one of the novel's major themes. Hope and Everell are both willing to break the law to help Magawisca escape from prison where she is unjustly confined. Everell deplores Esther Downing's unconditional adherence to the rules of the local theocracy. Esther, who has a Bible verse for every occasion, quotes Peter's admonition "to submit ourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake" (Chapter I: verse 2). Everell argues, "but surely, Esther, there must be warrant, as you call it, for sometimes resisting legitimate authority, or all our friends in England would be at open war with their king." The author also comments on the disparity between religious principles and practice. Magawisca explains that she distrusts Christians for this very reason (I, 86-87). In a footnote, Sedgwick cites the Moravian missionary, Heckelwelder, who was told by the Indians that while the white men "held their big Book in one hand, in

the other they had murderous weapons, guns and swords wherewith to kill us poor Indians" (II, 294, n.)

Sedgwick concluded that progress had been made since the Puritan Age, "which drove reformers to a dreary wilderness!--of that which hanged Quakers!--of that which condemned to death, as witches, innocent, unoffending old women! But it as unnecessary to heighten the glory of our brighter day by comparing it with the preceding twilight" (I, 27).

Yet the author seems to have become somewhat disillusioned about government and human nature since the writing of her first two novels. She writes in the preface to Hope Leslie that "The character of man and the institutions of society, are yet very far from their possible and destined perfection" (I, 27). No longer does she portray people as alternatively good or misguided, as she had in A New-England Tale, nor does she assume, as she had in Redwood, that the meeting of minds will obliterate social distinctions. In Hope Leslie, with its genuine villain and real bloodshed, she presents a world different from that of the earlier novels. Disappointment in love replaces the standard denouement of the virtuous heroine rewarded with a husband: the dutiful Esther and the selfless Magawisca lose Everell to the attractive,

though spineless Hope. And another character, the betrayed female page, laments, "Alas! alas! there is no happiness without innocence; if that be once lost, . . . happiness cannot be restored" (II, 242).

The novel is pervaded with a sense of loss for the pristine American wilderness, for a time when "the axman's stroke, that music to the settler's ear, never violated the peace of nature, or made discord in her music" (I, 140). Sedgwick's reverence for nature, which regularly sent her to Lenox or Stockbridge from New York City, is one more reason for her sympathy for Indians. She observed that "The savage was rather the vassal than the master of nature; obeying her laws, but never usurping her domain. . . . He did not presume to hew down her trees" (II, 139-140). Nature is the subject of some of her most poignant writing, and was ever a source of comfort to the writer. When she was nearing the end of her life, Catharine Sedgwick wrote in her Reminiscences:

Nature has been an ever fresh and growing beauty and enjoyment to me--and now when so many of my dearest friends are gone--when few, even of my contemporaries are left, when new social pleasures have lost their excitement, the sun coming up over these hills & sinking behind them, the spring & the dying year, all changes & aspects of nature are more beautiful to me than ever. They have more solemnity perhaps, but it is because they have more meaning.<sup>36</sup>

In Hope Leslie she is guarded in her assessment of the rapidly developing United States. "The gentle Housatonick wound through the depths of the valley," she wrote of her birthplace, "lingering like a lover amidst the vines, trees, and flowers that fringed its banks. Thus it flows now--but not as then in the sylvan freedom of nature, when no clattering mills and bustling factories, threw their prosaic shadows over the silver waters" (I, 139). It was only thirty years after Washington's Farewell Address (1796) yet Catharine Sedgwick expressed nostalgia for an earlier time, when the continent had been perceived as a tabula rasa for the American Experiment. Her initial enthusiasm for America's possibilities, voiced in her earlier writings, had given way to an awareness of the nation's problems. But her later work shows no indication of apathy or cynicism. After Hope Leslie Sedgwick would focus on attempting to change the democratic ideals. She would devote her time to the writing of didactic best-sellers and the founding of charitable organizations. The ultimate direction of her career is prophesied in a early letter to her brother Robert"

The country is condemned to the ministrations of inferior men, but it presents every facility for moral refinement and religious improvement. As you once told

me, dear Robert 'the impress of God's bounty is upon all his works.' Every object proclaims a present duty.<sup>37</sup>

Sedgwick would write only one more historical novel, The Linwoods, (1832) and that book had didactic overtones. But the genre that she abandoned seems to be her strength. In the preface to Hope Leslie she defines her role as historical novelist, stating that the book was "not offered to the public as being in any degree an historical narrative, or a relation of true events." Her intention "was to illustrate not the history, but the character of the times" (i). Her approach to historical fiction is in the spirit of the pictorial histories of her contemporary, Lord Macaulay, who aspired to "the art of narration, the art of interesting the affections and presenting pictures to the imagination."<sup>38</sup> Sedgwick's belief in the importance of remembering history, and her preoccupation with time's evanescence, give her writing great intensity-- as when she writes about the Indians: "Imagination may be indulged in lingering for a moment on those dusky regions of the past; but it is not permitted to reasonable instructed man, to admire or regret tribes of human beings, who lived and died, leaving scarcely a more enduring memorial, than the forsaken nest that vanishes before one winter's storms" (I, 140).

Hope Leslie brought the colonial period to life for readers of popular fiction for several generations. First published by White, Gallaher, and White in 1827, the book continued to be reissued by Harper and Brothers until the 1870s. To her contemporaries, the depiction of an American past brought a comforting sense of a shared national identity. The book was an important addition to a new nation's meager stockpile of native literature: When Catharine Sedgwick wove her fiction out of the materials of past events, she was a storyteller at her best.

Notes to Chapter V

<sup>1</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Hope Leslie (New York: White, Gallaher, and White, 1827), I, 63.

<sup>2</sup> Sedgwick, Hope Leslie, II, 179. All further references to this work appear in the text.

<sup>3</sup> William Cullen Bryant, "Review of Redwood," North American Review, Apr. 1825, p. 248.

<sup>4</sup> Bryant, p. 271.

<sup>5</sup> Walter Donald Kring, Liberals Among the Orthodox (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974), p. 95.

<sup>6</sup> Bryant, p. 245.

<sup>7</sup> Kring, p. 95.

<sup>8</sup> Letter to Charles Sedgwick, N.Y., 22 February 1825, ALS. This and all other journals and letters are in the Catharine Maria Sedgwick Papers, The Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Ma.

<sup>9</sup> Bryant, p. 271.

<sup>10</sup> Russel Nye, The Unembarrassed Muse: The Popular Arts in America (New York: Dial, 1970), p. 95.

<sup>11</sup> Jane Benardete, "Lydia Howard (Huntley) Sigourney," American Woman Writing: A Critical Reference Guide from Colonial Times to the Present, IV, 78-91.

<sup>12</sup> Mrs. L. H. Sigourney, "The Stockbridge Bowl," in Scenes in My Native Land (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1844), pp. 200-01.

<sup>13</sup> Edward Holsey Foster, Catharine Maria Sedgwick (New York: Twayne, 1974), p. 91.

<sup>14</sup> Foster, p. 91.

<sup>15</sup> Nye, p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> Foster, p. 83.

- 17 Francis James Child, ed. "James Harris, the Demon Lover," English and Scottish Popular Ballads (New York: Cooper Square Publishers, 1965), IV, 369.
- 18 Foster, p. 84.
- 19 Margaret Winthrop, Letter to Governor John Winthrop, 1628, as quoted in Norman Foerster, ed., American Poetry and Prose (Cambridge, Ma: Riverside, 1934), p. 116.
- 20 Seth Curtis Beach, Daughters of the Puritans (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1905), p. 7.
- 21 Journal, Stockbridge, 22 November 1845, MS.; Letter to Mrs. William Minot, N.Y., 13 May 1843, ALS.
- 22 Nathaniel Ward, from "The Simple Cobbler," as quoted in Foerster, ed., American Poetry and Prose.
- 23 Foster, p. 88.
- 24 Foster, p. 86.
- 25 Bryant, p. 260.
- 26 Foster, p. 86.
- 27 Foster, p. 86.
- 28 John Winthrop, The History of New England (1630-1649), ed. Kendall Hosmer (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), I, 220-21.
- 29 William Brandon, The American Heritage Book of Indians (New York: Dell, 1961), pp. 168-9.
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- 31 Brandon, p. 167.
- 32 Journal, "1821," MS.
- 33 Journal, Utica, 24 June 1821, MS.
- 34 Journal, Utica, 24 June 1821, MS.
- 35 Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Maypole of Merry Mount," in "The Complete Novels and Selected Tales",

ed., Norman Holmes Pearson (New York: Random House, 1937), pp. 886-87.

<sup>36</sup> "Journal of Reminiscences," p. 84, MS.

<sup>37</sup> Letter to Robert Sedgwick, Stockbridge, 10 September 1814, ALS.

<sup>38</sup> Macaulay, "The Task of The Modern Historian," Lord Macaulay, ed., Bliss Perry (New York: Doubleday and McClure, 1898), p. 8.

## CHAPTER VI

### Conveyances

It is ill-bred, uninvited, to look over a person who is reading a newspaper, or a book. It is ill-bred to take up a stranger's book without asking permission. It is ill-bred, at night, in a steamer, to talk, or make any unnecessary noise, for however unable you may be to sleep others would fain sleep, if they could.<sup>1</sup>

. . .

Servants are accustomed to cold rooms, my dear."

"I am not one of those sanguine advisors who flatter themselves that good advice must do good," wrote Catharine Sedgwick. "I am aware that there is nothing easier to give and nothing more difficult to take."<sup>3</sup> We have seen that the didactic element was present in all of Sedgwick's earlier fiction: A New England articulated the Unitarian faith; Redwood argued that character, not status, determined a person's worth; Hope Leslie depicted the cultural legacy of the colonial period. Of Sedgwick's fourth book, Clarence (1830), Seth Curtis Beach wrote, "I am glad to say, she sold the rights to the first edition

for \$1,200, before the critics got hold of it."<sup>4</sup>

Clarence fails as a didactic tale because it purports to be a novel. The scant plot concerns the heroine's departure to the country to avoid being corrupted by the fashionable New York society into which she was born. The book consists of interminable conversations on the virtues of simplicity and unselfishness.

Sedgwick next wrote The Linwoods (1835), a popular historical novel addressed primarily to children. The author adheres to the intention stated in her preface:

The writer has aimed to exhibit the feeling of the times, and to give her young readers a true, if a slight, impression of the condition of their country at the most--the only suffering period of its existence, and by means of this impression to deepen the gratitude to their patriot-fathers; a sentiment that will tend to increase their fidelity to the free institutions transmitted to them.<sup>5</sup>

Sedgwick's interest in ethics and social causes had become more compelling to her than the artistic impulse. For the next twenty years she would write only secular tracts.

In February of 1832, when she was completing her novel, Linwoods, Sedgwick had confided in her Journal that "If I had spirit to enter on a new career I would--history--biography--any thing seems now to be more attractive than this heavy work."<sup>6</sup> An alternative soon presented itself. Sedgwick's

affiliation with the Unitarian Church, which had inspired her to write the tract that became A New-England Tale, would once again shape the direction of her career. In January of 1834 the Reverend Henry Ware asked Sedgwick to contribute one volume to a collection of fables being written by members of the Unitarian Church. He specifically requested a story "between a formal tale and a common tract" showing "the practical character and influences of Christianity."<sup>7</sup> Sedgwick immediately undertook Ware's formidable request. She produced a didactic tale, Home, which was published by the Boston firm of J. Munroe. The instant success of Home encouraged Catharine Sedgwick to write two more didactic novels within two years, The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man (1836) and Live and Let Live; or, Domestic Service Illustrated (1837). These and most of her subsequent writings were published by Harper and Brothers. The didactic trilogy went through fifteen, sixteen, and twelve printings respectively, and the books would remain popular for the next fifty years. Harpers would call the trilogy one of the most popular series of works ever published."<sup>8</sup> Catharine Sedgwick would also contribute innumerable didactic stories to magazines and to gift books--nicely bound anthologies of stories and poems, replete with engravings depicting unrelated subjects.

Catharine Sedgwick hoped to help improve conditions for various socially and economically disadvantaged groups in America. She wrote: "We should admit, not theoretically and in our prayers, but practically, that we are children of one family, and that the happiness and advancement of one is the happiness and advancement of all."<sup>9</sup> The reality of this idea in nineteenth-century America fell far short of her ideal, yet she was optimistic about the future of democracy. Her didactic writings are based on faith in progress and the individual's capacity for self-improvement.

Sedgwick saw mobility as a fact of life in the United States and not merely as a possibility--America was the land of opportunity. She wrote:

There are no distinctions in America which are certain and permanent, but those of education and character. The tenant of a log-house in the western wilderness acquires independence, and becomes a representative to Congress, and his wife and daughters figure in the drawing-rooms of Washington. The merchant of New York fails in business, and removes his family from Broadway to a prairie-home.

She cautioned her readers that they must "look forward to these possible vicissitudes, and be prepared for them."<sup>10</sup>

Conscious of the flaws of the wealthy society into which she had been born, she became sympathetic to the working class. While taking the waters at Saratoga in April of 1835, she made this comment in her journal:

A more leaden batch of women I never saw--nothing of the brilliancy of fashion & nothing of the charm of nature and individuality--They have gone just far enough in civilization to obscure nature, & not far enough to polish it--The varnish is on, the last touches not given--Well, I care not for myself--tho' I would fain leave the drawing room and gossip with the laundresses under our windows.

Catharine Sedgwick objected to those who claimed superiority on the basis of wealth or distinguished ancestry. In The Linwoods she remarked that the upper class often tried to perpetuate the idea that class barriers are insurmountable. When the farmer's daughter, Bessie Lee, spends a year with the well-to-do Linwoods in New York City she is made to feel hopelessly inferior. "It was natural enough that she should have imbued this opinion, comments the author as narrator, "for being a child, the aristocratic opinions of the society she was in were expressed unmitigated by courtesy."<sup>12</sup> The protagonist of The Linwoods, Eliot Lee, is from a family of New England farmers. Sedgwick expressed her hopes for

America's future citizens in another character's description of Eliot:

Eliot's fine face, marked with nature's aristocracy . . . has that that is quality in the eye of God, I guess. I see it in his bearing, his speech, his voice. Well, I guess my children will live to see the day when the like of him will be the only gentlemen in the land. The Almighty must furnish the material, but the forming, polishing, and currency, must be the man's own doing."<sup>13</sup>

Sedgwick's didactic fiction praises the work ethic and emphasized that nor career is superior to another. A factory worker states in Live and Let Live: "I will not subject my children to being depraved by dependence on charity while they have a means of exertion--honest labor is never degrading."<sup>14</sup> Mr. Barclay, the model character in Home, says that he would be equally delighted if his sons became farmers, mechanics, doctors or lawyers:

All are working men. . . . What is there particularly elevating in sitting over a table and writing prescribed forms, or in inquiring into the particulars of diseases and doling out physic for them. It is certainly a false notion in a democratic republic, that a lawyer has any greater claim to respectability . . . than a tanner, a goldsmith, a printer, or a builder."<sup>15</sup>

Most of the heroes and heroines of Sedgwick's didactic fiction are either from the working class or

marry into it. The author's message is clearly stated by the omnipresent narrator who depicts various hardships of everyday life and suggests practical and moral solutions. Hers is not a Manichean world; there are no real villains, only the misguided. The exemplary characters--farmers, domestic servants, clerks, factory workers--all work hard, show respect for life, and think before they act. Virtue is rewarded by happiness, not necessarily by wealth. It is the American dream in Unitarian framework. The spare plots are the vehicles through which Sedgwick transmitted her ideas on ethics, education, and manners as they applied to American society in the mid-nineteenth century. The lifelike and appealing portraits present a positive image of working class people.

Home is dedicated to "Farmers and Mechanics." The hero, William Barclay, leaves his Massachusetts farm and establishes a printing business in New York City. He marries his childhood sweetheart and they set up housekeeping on Greenwich Street. Several scenes from the Barclays' daily life provide Sedgwick's readers with her conception of the ideal home: We see the Barclays at dinner and at their religious observances; we even witness the christening of their seventh child. The placid daily routine is interrupted when Mr. Barclay's business partner, Mr.

Norris, embezzles the firm's funds to repay his son's gambling debts. The son kills himself by taking laudanum, and the shock kills Norris, but not before he asks Barclay to forgive him and to spare his remaining son and daughter from the almshouse. So the Barclay family is increased by two. In several years, with prudence and thrift, the Barclays manage to realize their dream of returning to the Massachusetts countryside.

Like Home, The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man is intended to show that wealth does not guarantee happiness, nor is it synonymous with virtue, Morris Finley is burdened by the responsibilities of his wealth and position. Despite their lavish surroundings, his wife and children are bored and unpopular. When Finley goes bankrupt, he is unable to cope with his reduced circumstances. In contrast, their acquaintances, the Aikens, live simply and serenely on unfashionable Broome Street. They entertain their many friends in their cozy parlor, and even manage to take in homeless people now and then, including a derelict and a prostitute. By observing the Golden Rule the Aikens make a small contribution to society and find personal fulfillment. By the end of the story, with the help of a generous landlord, the Aikens move into the slightly larger house.

While the Barclays live comfortably and the Aikens have the necessities, the Lee family in Live and Let Live are destitute. Mr. Lee had once been a promising Massachusetts lawyer, but alcoholism has destroyed his career. Now the Lees, their three young daughters, and their crippled son Jemie all live in one room on Church Street. This book provides detailed descriptions of the plight of the urban poor. When the family is unable to afford even a loaf of bread, Mrs. Lee

"applied at a Venetian blind factory and obtained for her two younger girls, the one eleven and the other nine, the sewing of the worsted stays to the blinds, by which they could earn \$1.50 per week; and this in the intervals of their daily schooling."<sup>16</sup>

Their mother works in a slop-shop and takes in sewing. Lucy, the oldest child, must go to work as a maid. Sedgwick hoped to promote sympathy for the servant class, and the greater part of the book describes Lucy's various employers, her duties, and the exploitation to which she is subjected. She is cheated of her salary and her Sundays off; she nearly dies of pneumonia in the unheated servants' room. She is falsely accused of stealing one employer's best cape but is exonerated and thereby spared the penitentiary. Lucy escapes a lifetime of domestic

service when she marries the cheery and prosperous baker's son.

The didactic trilogy presents Sedgwick's ideas on improving American society. She suggests that education and manners are the means to social mobility, that home life is critical in determining character, and that social progress can best be achieved through the cumulative efforts of ethical people.

Catharine Sedgwick thought that differences in manners contributed to the perpetuation of class distinctions in the United States in Home. She suggests that a working man could surmount class boundaries if his "manners qualify him for polished society."<sup>17</sup> She illustrates through an anecdote how social mobility could be affected by attention to deportment:

"I do not know who that note came from," said a lady to me as I was reading one, "but I know it came from a well-bred person."

"Why?"

"Because it is neatly written, folded, directed, and sealed, and none but well-bred persons do these things as they should be."

The note was from a young girl, a domestic in friend's family."<sup>18</sup>

Sedgwick adds that she hopes the snobbish presumptions of this lady would soon be a thing of the past.

The author's definition of manners encompasses more than just etiquette. She writes: "A respect for your fellow-beings; a reverence for them as God's creatures, and your brethren, will inspire that delicate regard to their rights and feelings of which good manners is the sign."<sup>19</sup> Sedgwick articulated definition of manners which emphasized consideration for others, rather than what she perceived as the superficial behavior associated with upper-class British society. The differences between American and British society, which had impeded the creation of the novel of manners in the United States, also made the imported etiquette books less applicable to American lifestyles. Sedgwick's romantic fiction had departed from British literary models. Sedgwick discusses class differences and their effect on social interaction, but these are not part of the fabric of the plot as they are in the British novels of manners. In her didactic fiction Sedgwick rejects the mores of English society. She writes:

Even our own country had produced, as well as republished books, containing codes of manners. These proceed from modern antiquaries who, unconscious of the state of society in which they live, would mark it off into classes, after the fashion of the old world. . . . The rules they give are merely conventional, and have nothing to do with the essence of good manners.<sup>20</sup>

Having decided that etiquette books suitable for Americans were lacking, Catharine Sedgwick endeavored to write one. She commented that she had

seen it gravely stated by some writer on manners that "it takes three generations to make a gentleman." This is too slow a process in these days of accelerated movement, when we cross the Atlantic in twelve days, and when our broadcloth is manufactured in less time than our grandmothers spent in picking the wool.<sup>21</sup>

The etiquette book she wrote was Means and Ends, or, Self-Training, published in 1839. Means and Ends is a handbook of advice for girls of ten to sixteen. It spells out Sedgwick's practical suggestions for self-improvement and social interaction. Her views are not disguised by narrative, except for illustrative descriptions from the typical day of a character named Mary Bond. For twentieth century readers the book provides numerous details about everyday life in Sedgwick's time.

Catharine Sedgwick tells her readers that as Americans they do not have to occupy their minds with formal etiquette, such as "passing in a certain established order from the drawing to the dining-room, in dropping your eyes with punctual modesty, at the moment of raising a glass of wine to your lips" (p. 151). Sedgwick was sensitive to all criticism by

Europeans of American lifestyles. She recommends that her readers avoid faddish dress, because Americans have been faulted for this. In Sedgwick's opinion, most Americans fail to acknowledge the politeness of others with their thanks. She observes:

"I have often seen men in steamboats, in stagecoaches, in churches, and other public meetings, rise, and give their seats to women, and the women seat themselves quietly, without a look of word of acknowledgment. . . . Avoid such discourtesy, my young friends--it is not only displeasing, but unjust. . . . These little chance courtesies are smiles on the face of manners, and smiles are like sunshine--we can scarcely have too much of either (p. 153).

The greater part of Means and Ends is concerned not with etiquette but with education and hygiene. Sedgwick hopes to inculcate what she described as "a religious sense of the duty of cultivating the faculties God has given you" (p. 26). According to Sedgwick, one's primary responsibility is to care for one's health. She writes:

Look, my young friends, at the mass of diseases that are incurred by intemperance in eating, or drinking, or in study, or business; by neglect of exercise, cleanliness, pure air; by indiscreet dressing, tight lacing, & c., and all is quietly imputed to Providence! Is there not impiety as well as ignorance in this? (p. 41)

Sedgwick possesses the rather radical notion for her time that daily bathing would help maintain good health. "We hope the day will come when a house will not be considered comfortable without a bathing room," she wrote. "As yet, unhappily, baths are rare luxuries" (p. 48). Sedgwick is also a great advocate of flannel clothing and india rubbers. She urges women to avoid the illness and deformity of a "whalebone prison" (p. 57). She deplores the unfortunate practice of shutting children away from the fresh air, not only in factories, but in boarding schools. She exhorts girls not to be "satisfied with dawdling down Broadway, or Chestnut, or Washington Street, or any other thronged promenade, on a fine day, but [to] go into the open air, resolutely, and daily, in all weathers" (p. 63). Sedgwick's advice on nutrition is succinct:

"Avoid eating between meals, a too common practice with our young people. Eat very sparingly of cake, pastry, sweetmeats, pickles, and confectionary. Avoid bad bread, and cooking butter [rancid butter reserved for frying] as you would declared enemies. Do not touch greasy soups and hashes, and meats drenched in oiled butter. Attentively observe what agrees with you, and resolutely reject what does not. If you will do this, it will be better for you than reading all the books extant on diatetics" (p. 70).

On the subject of housekeeping Sedgwick writes:

"One great advantage of order is that it enables you

to go about your work calmly and with full possession of your mind which you will need, as much as your hands" (p. 104). She believes that all women, regardless of class, should be skilled at cooking and housekeeping. Thus, women with servants will be better able to run their households and will be prepared should their fortunes change. The exemplary farmer's daughter in Means and Ends, Mary Bond, knows how to keep house and run a farm by the time she is fourteen years old. Mary Bond, who is as ethical as she is self-reliant, will be "a moral force, that is to the moral world, what the steam-engine is to the physical" (p. 109).

Catharine Sedgwick emphasizes the importance of education in determining the success of the individual and by extension, the advancement of society. All the model children in her didactic fiction go to school. Even the Lees in Live and Let Live continue to send their children to school part-time, although the girls must also work in a factory. But Sedgwick thought that excessive studying was detrimental to a child's well being. The Barclays in Home are initially proud of the fact that their son, Charles is a good student, but when they see "his eye was getting sunken, and his cheek the pale and hollow appearance, that is so generally the effect of sedentary life,"<sup>22</sup> they send

him off to the country. In Means and Ends the parents of Raymond Bond

had fallen into the common error of cherishing unduly his love of study. Raymond, at the age when the constitution demands a great deal of exercise and sleep, was permitted to study all day, and sit up over his books half the night. To be sure he was the first scholar in his class, but was that a compensation for the hollow eye, and flame colored cheek, that indicated his constitution was undermining?--Nature's laws cannot be violated with impunity" (p. 128).

Sedgwick believes that moderation is the key to wisdom, but that books are a source of knowledge. She stresses that books are among our most important possessions. Barclay, her role model in Home, is tempted to buy a Geneva clock that he knows his bride will like. After agonizing for a while, he buys a perfectly serviceable clock for only five dollars and spends the difference on books. His library consists of dictionaries, an Atlas, a Bible, a cookbook, with literature represented only by Milton, Pope, Addison and Goldsmith. Sedgwick confides in her "Journal of Reminiscences" that these were the books she was given to read as a child.<sup>23</sup> Sedgwick was apparently less fond of fellow novelists, though she does prescribe Sir Walter Scott and Maria Edgworth in Means and Ends (p. 247). The books Sedgwick recommended in her

didactic fiction were the sources for the quotations which head the chapters of her books. These epigraphs are invariably culled for their practical wisdom. She selects Cowper's couplet,

O bright occasions of dispensing good  
How seldom used, how little understood!

and Johnson's counsel,

Pour forth thy fervors for a healthful mind,  
Obedient passion, and a will resigned.

Even Shakespeare receives similar treatment:

The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars  
But in ourselves, that we are underlings.<sup>24</sup>

It is to Milton, that most scholarly of writers, that Sedgwick responds emotionally, rather than with her usual pragmatism. She wrote to her friend Eliza Cabot that she had been deeply moved by "Milton's article on divorce--and it speaks so beautifully, and maiden as I am, I believe so truly in the profitable happiness of marriage that he has conjured up from the burial places of my imagination the visions of my youth."<sup>25</sup> Her quotation of Milton is likewise sentimental. She selects for an epigraph a passage from Comus in which a brother expresses his feelings on discovering his sister's absence:

I do not, brother,  
Infer, as if I thought my sister's state  
Secure, without all doubt or controversy;  
Yet where an equal poise of hope or fear  
Does arbitrate the event, my nature is  
That I incline to hope rather than fear.<sup>26</sup>

Sedgwick viewed America's future with "hope rather than fear," but she placed considerable emphasis on the importance of family life in shaping the individual and, by extension, society. In the model households of her didactic fiction there are earnest family discussions, family members study together, pray together, and are shown in their parlors busily employed in worthwhile activities, such as reading, sewing, or drawing. In Home the author contrasts the dinner hours of the Barclays and their neighbors, the Anthon. The moral is that orderly behavior creates a better home environment. The Barclay children sit quietly and eat sparingly. They cheerfully give their dessert to a dinner guest. The Anthon children, on the other hand, scramble merrily, unchecked by their tolerant, unperturbed parents. The Anthon household is intended to be a negative example, but the children seem natural, if irrepressible. The Barclays appear stilted and unconvincing as illustrations of ideal family interaction. Her later works express a more relaxed approach to child-rearing. In Live and Let Live, written only two years later, a sympathetically

portrayed character named Mrs. Lovett allows her son, just once, to take a rooster upstairs to serve as an alarm clock.

The heroine and heroines of Sedgwick's fiction treat others in a respectful manner. They give freely of their time, knowledge, and possessions. In doing so they improve society while they find personal fulfillment. They allow poor relations and even more acquaintances to live in their homes. In Home both the well-to-do Barclays and their immigrant neighbors the Phaelans invite less fortunate people to stay with them. In The Poor Rich Man this hospitality is carried to such an extreme that it becomes humorous: even though Mr. Aiken is much poorer than Barclay, the Aikens take into their cramped New York house not only the sickly son of the honest but destitute laborer M'Elroy, but an uncle and sister-in-law, the orphan daughter of a prostitute, the daughter of the bankrupt business associate, and a genteel English curate, who is found wandering the streets by one of Aiken's sons. This curate contributes to the edification of the neighborhood by giving weekly lectures on natural history in the Aikens' parlor.

The model characters in Sedgwick's didactic novels assume the responsibility of educating the children of their immigrant servants and neighbors. The exemplary

Barclays of Home turn their parlor into a school room. The Irish Catholic families do not send their children to the public school, but allow them to receive instruction from the Barclays, who have won their trust. Mr. Barclay teaches the children writing, natural history, and moral education--which consists of respect for life and the Christian virtues. Meanwhile, Mr. Barclay informs the parents about American laws and government. His wife says:

He tries to make them feel their privileges and duties as American citizens and to instruct them in the happy, exalted, and improving condition of man at the present time, and in our country, compared with what has been hithertofore, or is elsewhere. . . . We wish to make them feel the immense power and worth of their faculties, and their responsibility to God for the proper use of them.<sup>27</sup>

We shall later examine how Catharine Sedgwick put into effect the ideas expressed in her didactic fiction by organizing a free school and a tutoring program run by society matrons in New York, organizations that are still in existence.

A notable passage in Home illustrates Sedgwick's methods both as a didactic writer and as a social reformer. The occasion is a class given by a Mrs. Barclay for her own children and the Irish servants. The passage illustrates the benefits and the

complications that may result from charitable activities of this sort. The Barclay's little daughter Mary has just announced that her brothers and sisters and the servants have spent part of Sunday afternoon drawing pictures of animals. She is telling this to a neighbor, Mrs. Hart, who has come to inquire about the Barclay's unusual practice of educating the Irish children along with their own.

"This is a singular occupation for Sunday," said Mrs. Hart. Mary perceived this implied censure. "Oh, but Ma'am," she said, "You don't know what we do it for. After we have finished, mother tells us all about the animal,--how its frame is contrived for its own happiness,--how God has prepared its food, for you know the Bible says the young ravens cry unto him and he feedeth then;--and then she explains what she calls the relations between man and animals, and Pat Phealan says mother makes him feel as if the dumb creatures were his first cousins,--Pat is so droll. He says he never throws a stone at a dog now, and he can't bear to see the men cruelly whip their horses,--'he won't, plase God he ever owns one;' you know Pat is Irish."<sup>28</sup>

Through a few lines of dialogue, Sedgwick deftly creates characters and gives greater depth to those already presented. Mrs. Hart is polite but suspicious of this unorthodox Sunday activity. It is from Mary's viewpoint that we learn about the school. Mary vehemently defends the family routine. Like most of Sedgwick's child characters she is truthful and

without guile. Sedgwick accepted the Romantic notion that children are wise and pure, an idea expressed by Wordsworth:

The Child is father of the Man;  
And I could wish my days to be  
Bound each to each by natural piety.<sup>29</sup>

The well-meaning Mrs. Barclay provides a lesson designed to increase the students' knowledge and further their moral development. Sketching animals leads to a lecture on natural science. The Biblical reference to ravens continues the animal theme and teaches a reverence for all living things.

As a writer of popular fiction Catharine Sedgwick addressed a wide audience which included both those who might give charity and those who may have to accept it. In the same passage she deals with the problems that may arise in the relationship between these two groups. Mrs. Barclay's lesson, however well intended, is not entirely acceptable to one of her pupils. Although Pat Phealan is charming and good natured, he indicates that he has been insulted, that Mrs. Barclay is making an analogy between God's taking care of the animals and her own charity to the Irish. Catharine Sedgwick is able to step beyond her status of philanthropist to recognize that those less fortunate have their integrity and their pride, too.

Herman Melville, who worshipped with Sedgwick at the First Unitarian Church in New York, wrote what may be a satire of The Poor Rich Man and the Rich Poor Man. Melville's story is entitled "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs." In a rural setting after a snowstorm, a poet remarks to his companion:

Nature is in all things beneficent; and not only so, but considerate in her charities, as any discreet human philanthropist might be. This snow, now, which seems so unseasonable, is in fact just what a poor husbandman needs. Rightly is this soft March snow, falling just before seed-time, rightly is it called 'Poor Man's Manure.' Distilling from king heaven upon the soil, by a gentle penetration it<sup>30</sup> nourishes every clod, ridge, and furrow.

The poet suggests another far-fetched simile when he calls the snow "Poor Man's Eye-Water." He says:

"Take this soft March snow, melt it and bottle it. . . . I have a whole demi-john of it myself. But the poorest man, afflicted in his eyes, can freely help himself to this same all-bountiful remedy. Now what a kind provision is that!"

"Then' Poor Man's Manure' is 'Poor Man's Eye-water' too?"

"Exactly. And what could be more economically contrived? One thing answering two ends--ends so very distinct."

"Very distinct indeed" (p. 167).

After more of this banter the poet's friend visits a humble cottage in order to sample poor man's pudding, in which snow takes the place of the eggs. Melville

may be satirizing Sedgwick's use of local color and her admiration for folk wisdom when the cottager speaks of his wife: "Well, I've heard that some women ain't all maple-sugar; but content with dear Martha, I don't know much about others." The guest replies: "You find rare wisdom in the woods" (pp. 172-3).

The visitor departs, having observed the rural couple's poverty, and having been told of the deaths of their children. He declares: "I could stay no longer to hear of sorrows for which the sincerest sympathies could give no adequate relief . . . of causeless self-upbraidings, which no expostulations could have dispelled" (p. 176). He declines to offer any assistance in what he views a hopeless situation, the "misery and infamy which is, ever has been, and ever will be." The author of The Confidence Man concludes: "Of all the preposterous assumptions of humanity over humanity, nothing exceeds most of the criticisms made on the habits of the poor by the well-housed, well-warmed, and well-fed" (p. 177).

Edward Halsey Foster concurs. In his modern study of Sedgwick he writes:

In an era of causes and moral literary instruction, Miss Sedgwick certainly fit the classification of "Blue-stocking"--that is, in a somewhat pedantic fashion, she suggested in her writings solutions for what she considered the major faults of American

society. In fact, she knew little of politics or economics, and her knowledge of lower-class life was derived almost entirely from rumor. As a member of committees formed to achieve social reforms, she visited such institutions as prisons and workhouses; but, unlike Charles Dickens, for example,<sup>91</sup> she never personally experienced lower-class life.

Sedgwick's contemporaries were overwhelmingly enthusiastic about her didactic fiction. The author's noble aims and her moral precepts were lauded by critics and respected public figures. William Ellery Channing would declare that the didactic trilogy "form an era in our literature." In a letter of congratulations to the author Reverend Channing wrote: "I cannot, without violence to my feelings, refrain from expressing to you the great gratification with which I have read your 'Live and Let Live.' Thousands will be better for it." Beach records that Chief Justice Marshall said, "Tell her I have read with great pleasure everything she has written, and wish she would write more." Ministers and educators would praise Sedgwick's books. Foster reports that

Having read The Poor Rich Man, the Boston Unitarian minister Dr. Joseph Tuckerman, wrote to Miss Sedgwick that "most gratefully do I rejoice that this power is consecrated by you to the highest and noblest ends." Joseph Curtis, a noted educator whose biography Miss Sedgwick later wrote, added that, "in all his experience, he had never witnessed so much good fruit from the

publication of any book." Bryant recorded that one publisher, while correcting proofs for one of the books, "was fairly carried away by his emotions, and could not restrain himself from weeping profusely."

The fact that the didactic trilogy was reprinted numerous times over a fifty year period attests to the books' popular appeal. For modern readers these books serve as indicators of popular tastes and sentiments in mid-nineteenth century America. Evidently Catharine Maria Sedgwick voiced the ethics to which her generation aspired.

Notes to Chapter VI

<sup>1</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Means and Ends, or Self-Training (Boston: Marsh, Capen, Lyon, and Webb; 1839), p. 161.

<sup>2</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Live and Let Live; or, Domestic Service Illustrated (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1837), p. 116.

<sup>3</sup> Sedgwick, Means and Ends, p. 267.

<sup>4</sup> Seth Curtis Beach, Daughters of the Puritans (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1905), p. 31.

<sup>5</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick, The Linwoods (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1835), v.

<sup>6</sup> Journal, Monday, 11 February 1832, MS. This and all other journals and letters are in The Catharine Maria Sedgwick Papers, The Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Ma.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Halsey Foster, Catharine Maria Sedgwick (New York: Twayne, 1974), p. 17.

<sup>8</sup> Foster, p. 117.

<sup>9</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick, The Poor Rich Man and The Rich Poor Man (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1836), p. 155.

<sup>10</sup> Sedgwick, Means and Ends, p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> Journal, Thursday, 30 April 1835, MS.

<sup>12</sup> Sedgwick, The Linwoods, I, 71-2.

<sup>13</sup> Sedgwick, Linwoods, I, 254.

<sup>14</sup> Sedgwick, Live and Let Live, p. 15.

<sup>15</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Home (Boston: J. Munroe, 1835), p. 46.

<sup>16</sup> Sedgwick, Live and Let Live, p. 28.

- 17 Sedgwick, Home, p. 40.
- 18 Sedgwick, Means and Ends, p. 28.
- 19 Sedgwick, Means and Ends, p. 148.
- 20 Sedgwick, Means and Ends, p. 143-4.
- 21 Sedgwick, Means and Ends, p. 150.
- 22 Sedgwick, Home, p. 133.
- 23 "Journal of Reminiscences," p. 86, MS.
- 24 Sedgwick, Home, pp. 103, 17, 33.
- 25 Letter to Eliza Cabot, 29 June 1829, ALS.
- 26 Sedgwick, Linwoods, I, 98.
- 27 Sedgwick, Home, p. 76.
- 28 Sedgwick, Home, p. 71.
- 29 William Wordsworth, "My heart leaps up when I behold," as quoted in Morris Bewley, ed., The English Romantic Poets (New York: The Modern Library, 1970), p. 175.
- 30 Herman Melville, "Poor Man's Pudding and Rich Man's Crumbs," in The Complete Stories of Herman Melville, Jay Leyda, ed. (New York: Random House, 1949), p. 167. All further references to this work appear in the text.
- 31 Foster, pp. 123-4.
- 32 Beach, p. 32.
- 33 Foster, pp. 117-118.

## CHAPTER VII

### Good Causes

There is no happiness like that  
of energetically employing our  
faculties to achieve some good end.<sup>1</sup>

. . .

Solitary and lonesome, in Uncle Phil's  
social vocabulary, stood for all modes<sup>2</sup>  
of wretchedness and uncomfortableness.

Catharine Maria Sedgwick, the celebrated and highly respected author of didactic fiction, was approached by various reformers who hoped she would lend her name to their organizations. She acquiesced to Catharine Beecher's request to be on a charity committee dedicated to "saving the country" through education,<sup>3</sup> but she usually declined to associate herself with radical reform movements. She was at heart a diplomat and a mediator. She disassociated herself from militant feminists for much the same reason that she refused to support the John Brown Abolitionists. Although she was against slavery and for women's rights she believed that radical groups created more antagonism than they resolved.

In her handbook for young women, Means and Ends, she comments on the stance of the suffragists:

You will hear some persons maintain, that they have been defrauded of their rights--that men, taking advantage of their physical superiority, have made the laws such as to deprive women of the exercise of their natural and equal rights, and to keep them in a condition of perpetual subordination and inferiority. You will even hear it asserted, by some of the bold advocates of your own sex, that women ought to have an equal participation in making laws, and framing constitutions; and that, while deprived of this right, they do not owe obedience to existing<sup>4</sup> laws, or fealty to established institutions.

While she did not support the suffragists, Sedgwick favored legislation to protect the rights of women. She was of the opinion

that the laws should be so amended, that a women ill-treated by her husband, should be permitted to leave him, and to retain the custody of her children. That married women who come into possession of property by their own acquisition, by inheritance, or by gift, should be permitted to use, retain, or dispose of it in their own right, and that, at the death of the husband, the wife should have the same rights over the property, and the children, that the husband has, when he is the survivor.<sup>5</sup>

According to Sedgwick, the time had not yet come for the realization of the reforms demanded by the radical women's rights advocates. She thought that women could exert considerable influence upon society

even if they did not "lead armies, harangue in halls of legislation, bustle up to the ballot boxes, or sit on judicial tribunals." They could assume increasingly greater power through "an unobtrusive process," as teachers, wives, and mothers. Sedgwick wrote: "The work that is done quietly and in seclusion is as important as that which is manifested by collision and noise."<sup>6</sup>

We have remarked on Sedgwick's faith in the success of the American experiment. Her optimism about the future of the United States encompassed women's rights. She believed that nineteenth-century women had made greater strides toward equality with men than had their contemporaries in other countries. "Old prejudices and old abuses are fast melting away from among us," she wrote. "Here generous minded men are allowing women's claim to a more independent existence, and more varied employments, than they have enjoyed elsewhere."<sup>7</sup> Sedgwick contrasts the status of women in the United States and the Middle East:

The females of the Eastern world have been kept in a depressed and helpless condition. They have been looked upon as born merely to serve men, and in various ways to minister to their pleasure. They have never enjoyed an independent and individual existence, and have only been allowed to live as part and parcel of men; the subjects of their love, and their domestic slaves. Mahomet did not, as has been maintained, deny to them

immortality, but the institutions of his religion deprived them of all means of preparing for it."

Sedgwick concludes: "The consequence of this abject condition has been, that they have remained children all their lives. The favorites of the Sultan at Constantinople amuse themselves with blind man's bluff, hunt the slipper, and other sports of our nursery children."

Although they had more rights than Arab women, European women were oppressed by rigid class distinctions. Sedgwick wrote:

"The women of the highly civilized countries of Europe are divided into distinct ranks. They are separated by boundary lines that are seldom passed. Those of the upper ranks are exempted from manual labor. Those of the lower order are wholly confined to it, so that they have neither time nor opportunity to cultivate their minds, and refine their manners."

Sedgwick thought that in one respect the status of American women did not measure up to that of their British contemporaries: Single women in America were stigmatized to a far greater extent than in England. In the preface to her two-volume book, Married or Single?, Sedgwick wrote: "Our story will not have been in vain, if it has done any thing towards raising

the single women of our country to the comparatively honorable level they occupy in England."<sup>9</sup>

Catharine Sedgwick, who was single, wrote in her journal: "From my own experience I would not advise anyone to remain unmarried."<sup>10</sup> Life was difficult for single women in an era when all women were expected to marry. Spinsters were social outcasts, vulnerable to derision. At best, they might be able to depend on the charity of relatives. If not, they had to search for a means of supporting themselves at a time when few careers were open to women. The plight of single women would become one of Sedgwick's causes. She would attempt to change the public's attitude toward spinsters by means of her didactic fiction.

We have observed that Sedgwick's second novel, Redwood, includes a portrait of a respected, self-reliant, and formidable spinster. Aunt Debby Lenox can set the bones of horses as well as heal the sick townspeople in her New England hamlet. But the didactic fiction illustrates many of the problems faced by single women. The sharp-tongued Aunt Betsy in Home lives with her nephew and his family because they consider it their duty to take care of her. In Live and Let Live the daughter of a bankrupt lawyer endures the hardships of life as a parlormaid until her marriage to a baker rescues her from a lifetime of

domestic service. Sedgwick directly addresses the stigma against spinsters in a bitter didactic tale which appeared in a gift book entitled The Offering: A Christmas and New Year's Present (1834). The story "Old Maids" is hardly full of Christmas cheer, but the author may have felt that Christmas was an opportune time to increase the public's sympathy toward spinsters. The story is written in the form of a conversation between a young girl and her matronly neighbor. Anne says, "Tell me honestly, Mrs. Seton, now when no male ears are within hearing, whether you do not, in your secret soul, think there is something particularly unlovely, repelling, and frightful, in the name of old maid." Mrs. Seton replies

"In the name, certainly; but it is because it does not designate a condition but a species. It calls up the idea of a faded, bony, wrinkled, skinny, jaundiced personage, . . . who, in short, is in the condition of the spirits in the ancients' Tartarus, an impalpable essence, tormented with the desires of humanity."<sup>11</sup>

To refute this stereotype, Mrs. Seton recounts the lives of several well-liked spinsters in the village, who have in common their hard lives and their usefulness to others. It seems that a life of self-sacrifice is necessary if spinsters wish to be happy and popular. The two women discuss the

approaching wedding of their acquaintance, Emily Moreland. Like Charlotte in Jane Austen's Pride and Prejudice, Emily is no longer young and has agreed to marry a man she cannot possibly love. But unlike Charlotte, she is well-to-do. Simply to avoid being an old maid, Emily consents to "be yoked in the most intimate relation of life, and for life to a person to whom you would have clung to save you from an abyss, but whom you would not select to pass an evening with."<sup>12</sup>

In Married or Single? Sedgwick shows that women will go to extreme lengths to escape the designation of "old maid." One of the town gossips says: "Old Sally Ford had married at last, some said because she wanted to have Mrs. put on her tombstone; but Sally herself said, it was because she observed pious people always prayed for widows, and never for old maids!"<sup>13</sup>

In Married or Single? Sedgwick attacks the prevalent notion "that marriage is not only the felicity of woman, but her dignity, her attractiveness, her usefulness depends on it. . . . The choice of the alternative is never to be thought of."<sup>29</sup> A woman's marital status should affect neither her standing in society nor her own self respect. She calls the reader's attention to the many single women who "were occupied in the certain good of relieving the poor

mortals already here, instead of the uncertain benefit of bringing others into the world, who would not find it well to be in it." She expressed the hope that the book would help increase respect for married women. Each woman she wrote in the preface, "has an independent power to shape her own course, and to forge her separate way."<sup>14</sup>

Catharine Sedgwick believed that education was the panacea. "Educate yourselves well," she wrote in 1839, "and then you will be equal to either fortune--wives or single women, you will be blessings and blessed." She thought "that women should be so educated as to develop and fortify their reasoning powers, and to qualify them for more various and higher employments."<sup>15</sup> She advised single women:

Be sure to be so educated that you can have an independent pursuit, or something to occupy your time and interest your affections; then marriage will not be essential to your usefulness, respectability or happiness. Then you will not be the old maid, touched by every ill word, and dependent on every chance kindness, but you will secure an independent existence, and the power of dispensing to others."<sup>16</sup>

According to Sedgwick, if single women were educated, they would cease to be a disadvantaged group in American society. She drew a parallel between the conditions of slavery and spinsterhood. "As slaves

must be trained for freedom," she wrote, "so women must be educated for usefulness, independence, and contentment in single life."<sup>17</sup>

Catharine Sedgwick did not support the suffragists and she refused to ally herself with the Abolitionists. She explained her anti-Abolitionist stance in an 1835 entry in her journal:

Today Miss [Harriet] Martineau arrived from Boston--I passed a part of the morning with her. Her mind is much excited on the Anti Slavery Subject--& Abon--to exaggerate the importance of the subject is impossible but I think like all those who stand near a conflagration she sees objects in an exaggerated or perhaps a false light--She fancies herself in danger of being the martyr, as she feels herself to be the apostle of the cause--she had been much with the Abolitionists--people of constitutional enthusiasm highly excited--pioneers as my brother once said are very apt to be lost on the road they are opening for others--If they must be fanatics may it be in this most generous of causes.<sup>18</sup>

Sedgwick was opposed to slavery on principle if not in practice. She wrote in the preface to her most famous novel, Hope Leslie:

The liberal philanthropist will not be offended by a representation which supposes that the elements of virtue and intellect are not withheld from any branch of the human family; and the enlightened and accurate observer of human nature, will admit that the difference of character among the various races of the earth, arises mainly from differences of condition.<sup>19</sup>

Sedgwick commented on slavery in her fiction and included several black characters. In Linwoods she satirizes the stereotypes of black people. Jupe, the servant of the Linwood family is a caricature--superstitious, cowardly, and given to malapropisms. In the first chapter of Volume One, we see him accompanying Linwood's daughter Belle and her school friend Bessie Lee on an evening walk. He attempts to persuade them to return home, although they are intent on visiting a fortune teller. "I must detest in your ma's name against your succeeding farther," Jupe says.<sup>20</sup> Belle decides, for fun, to pretend that she sees ghosts when they walk past the town gallows (located, we are told, near Broadway and Chatham Street in New York City.) Belle says,

"Jupe, is not that the place where they hung the poor creatures who were concerned in the negro-plot?. . . . Did not some of your relations suffer there?. . . . Is it true, Jupe, that their ghosts walk about here, and have been seen many a time when it was so dark you could not see your hand before your face?"

"I dare say, Miss Belle. Them that's hung unjustly always travels."

The narrator interposes the explanation that Jupe has been conditioned by "the traditionary superstitions with which his mind was previously filled."<sup>21</sup>

In the same novel there is a fully-drawn portrait of a dignified and eloquent black woman named Rose who

may have been modeled on the Sedgwick's nurse Mumbet, described by Sedgwick as having "a clear and nice perception of justice and a stern love of it, an uncompromising honesty in work and deed."<sup>22</sup> Rose speaks out against slavery:

"Since I came to a thinking age, I never have had one happy hour or minute, Miss Belle."

"Oh, Rose, Rose! why not, for pity's sake?"

"I am a slave."

. . . "Are not papa and mamma ever so kind to you? and do not Herbert and I love you next best to them?"

"Yes, and that lightens the yoke; but still it is a yoke, and it galls. I can be bought and sold like the cattle. I would die to-morrow to be free to-day. Oh, free breath is good--free breath is good!" She uttered this with closed <sup>23</sup>teeth and tears running down her cheeks.

Belle is moved by Rose' uncharacteristic display of emotion and persuades her father to have Rose freed. She continues to work for the Linwoods, just as the real-life Mumbet worked for the Sedgwicks.

In a subsequent chapter of this Revolutionary War novel, Rose and the household are shown arguing the merits of their owners risking their lives to fight the Tories. It is apparent that Sedgwick had listened closely to the speech patters and thought about the emotions of the black people she knew. The characters in her fiction give voice to their feelings about being enslaved. Rose says:

"Can't you see these men are raised up to fight for freedom for more than themselves: If the chain is broken at one end, the links will fall apart sooner or later. When you see the sun on the mountain-top, you may be sure it will shine into the deepest valleys before long."

Jupe replies: "I'spose what you mean, Rose, is that all men are going to be free. I heard Mr. Herbert say, when he argied with master, that 'all men were born free and equal;' he might as well say, all men were born white and tall."<sup>24</sup>

Sedgwick's sympathy for American Indians is communicated in her best-selling novel, Hope Leslie, with the memorable Pequod heroine, Magawisca. An Indian is also the central character of a fine short story, "Berkeley Jail," which Sedgwick contributed to the gift book entitled The Atlantic Souvenir, 1832. Sam Whistler is a Seneca, tall and elegant, and possessing "the common vices so generously communicated by the whites to the vanishing race, in exchange for their broad lands and bright streams." He lives peaceably on the outskirts of town employed in "hunting, fishing, basket and broom making and such other little arts as did not in his estimation, degrade him to the level of civilization."<sup>25</sup> Wrongly accused of murder, he is confined in jail. The next morning the cell is empty, the bars severed. The

search party, aided by a bearded stranger on horseback is unsuccessful. The next day the horse returns riderless. Attached to the saddle are the wig and whiskers that a village boy had smuggled to Sam in jail. Sedgwick's story is a prototype of the tradition of the Indian who refuses to be shackled by white man's society.

Catharine Sedgwick was concerned about a number of socially and economically disadvantaged groups in America. Much of her energy was directed toward servants and recent immigrants, who would become the heroes of her didactic fiction. The plight of Lucy in Live and Let Live; or, Domestic Service Illustrated is particularly arresting because she is from a middle class family that has fallen on hard times. Lucy is subjected to insensitive treatment by a variety of employers. One lady cheats Lucy of her holidays and of a portion of her salary. The same employer exploits a Polish manservant until his English improves sufficiently for him to understand what she is doing. Another lady who wastes all her pity on sentimental novels, will pay seven dollars for a hat, but only three dollars a month for wages. A third employer, Mrs. Ardley, is described memorably as "very kindly disposed, though from the want of judgment and reflection her benevolence, like waste steam, was lost

in noisy and useless effusions. Mrs. Simson is a "driver" whose main interests are money, status and successful marriages for her daughters. She actually tries to sell her daughter's discarded earrings to Lucy to enhance the appearance of her parlormaid and simultaneously make a profit. All of Lucy's employers habitually talk in front of their servants as if they were absent; one comments on how difficult it is to teach the lower classes.

A formidable amount of work is required to maintain a nineteenth century household: cleaning grates, polishing brasses, hauling pails of water, and clear-starching linens. But Lucy's mother says, "I will not subject my children to being deprived by dependence of charity while they have a means of exertion--honest labor is never degrading."<sup>26</sup>

Catharine Sedgwick's respect for the work of servants was probably derived from her father, who drew upon the practical attitude of his own farming ancestors, to insist that his children learn housework and farm chores.<sup>27</sup> The model characters in Sedgwick's fiction invariably treat their servants with the greatest respect and consideration. The Barclays in Home pass up a roomy house in New York with a basement kitchen for a small house with a pleasant kitchen on the first floor. They want to keep their servant

Martha happy. Furthermore, Martha is periodically sent home to New England for vacations.

In her handbook for young ladies entitled Means and Ends, Sedgwick devotes a great deal of space to the relationship between the housewife and her servants. She particularly addresses "those young persons, who bred up in luxurious establishments in town, are cut off from all accidental and irresistible opportunities of acquiring a knowledge of domestic affairs." She writes:

Such ladies may be so fortunate as to secure competent, well instructed and faithful domestics, but . . . those to whose share they do not fall, must make up their account to having sometimes confusion and disorder in their establishment, to finding they have been imposed upon, or, what is far more painful, that they have been unjust to their domestics."<sup>28</sup>

Sedgwick considered a knowledge of housekeeping to be essential for the well-to-do, particularly in America where so many of the servants were untrained farm laborers or immigrants.

The dire consequences of an ignorance of household matters are illustrated by the misadventures of a housewife when a "commercial crisis" forces her and her husband to move out West and live more moderately than before. The first problem arises when the usual retinue of six servants must be reduced to

two. One is a farm girl who is a model servant for two weeks, whereupon she leaves without notice. The author's wry wit surfaces as the housewife says, "She went off to be married to a young farmer at the head of the river, telling me, very coolly, that she should think, 'I might have expected as much--that girls that came to the West, calculated to be married!'" The Irish maid knows hardly more about housework than her employer, so the housewife, Rose, finds herself virtually without help at home. She experiences a series of mishaps: "'What stuff is that?' asked my husband when I poured out the coffee."<sup>29</sup>

When Rose, who has been hired as the nursemaid, refuses to iron some shirts, Catharine Sedgwick depicts the tension that can erupt between servant and employer in an American setting. She displays her talent for characterization through dialogue when the lady tells her friend that Rose had

replied pettishly "that she could not do every thing;" and I, not accustomed, you know, to submit to any impertinence from my people, retorted sharply. The consequence was, that she fell to crying. "If she could not please me," she said, "she would have me--It was Anne had invited her to come and live all the same as a sister with her, and sure that would be more pleasing with living at service and not giving satisfaction--There was no need to living a servant any way in a new country where there was room for all, and plenty."<sup>30</sup>

Sedgwick communicates the lady's dismay when her accustomed authority is questioned. She also conveys the disappointment of the immigrant who thought to find America a land of opportunity where the streets were paved with gold. In Home an immigrant named Phaelan says with unconscious irony of his adopted country: "No honest man in it need go to bed to dream of hungry children."<sup>31</sup> The words of many of the characters in the didactic fiction allude to the American dream not realized in their lifetime. The books serve as reminders of the need for social reform, and the need for greater understanding of the less privileged groups in America.

In 1839, during her tour of Europe, Sedgwick visited the passengers in steerage on the steamer, St. James. In her journal she describes their wariness and resentment:

I have observed from the first and expression of insolent distrust on the faces of the men in steerage & of shyness or alienation & resentment that is not uncommon with the lower class of foreigners. From the first I was determined to make friends with the steerage passengers and show them the friendliness I really felt. The first thing I did after getting on my legs was to pay them a visit. . . . Two or three were civil enough, but for the most part they kept aloof. . . . The men looked on with a look that did not need language to express faithlessness and insolence. Poor creatures, I do not blame them.

Sedgwick was wounded whether well-meanings attempts at kindness were rejected, but she was undeterred. She wrote: "It requires as high a moral cultivation to produce faith in man as religious cultivation to perfect it in God."<sup>32</sup>

During her travels abroad, Sedgwick was horrified by the number of beggars she saw, by the filth and desperation. Overcome by a visit to an orphanage in Germany she wrote, "I have seen nothing that has gone so deep into my heart as those little ones. . . . Oh, how earnestly I wished I could avert their lot of inevitable poverty."<sup>33</sup> Her memories of the people in Europe made her feel more privileged than before to be an American. She was also better able to understand the degree to which America was seen as a symbol of hope by immigrants, and how quickly these preconceptions could be shattered upon their arrival. "These people," she wrote in her journal, "have suffered from the abuses in their own land and have gone to America with golden dreams where they have been disappointed. . . . In America, seeing no barriers, they fancy there are no distinctions."<sup>34</sup>

The author showed special sympathy for Irish Americans, and wrote of their "infusion of an element of warmth and generosity into our national character."<sup>35</sup> She was born before the first wave of

Irish emigration and reached its peak. Her childhood acquaintance with the Irish was limited to one man, her mother's retired servant, Larry Lynch. When Pamela Dwight was a small child it was he who had bidden her at the threat of an Indian raid. In her memoirs Catharine Sedgwick recalled:

Through all my childhood Larry Lynch was the only Irish inhabitant of Stockbridge! I do not believe that there were then half a dozen in the country. . . . And now there are two thronged churches in Berkshire and occasional mass in all the villages when they swarm. What would dear old Dr. West, our sixty year defender of the Puritan faith. . . . What would he say<sup>36</sup> to the multitudinous church of Antichrist!

To the dismay of many citizens of her conservative home town, Catharine Sedgwick would join another "Church of Anti-Christ," the Unitarian church. It would bring her in contact with many groups other than Anglo-Saxon New Englanders. She describes the composition of her church in New York City:

The women of the little heretical zion have been striving of a Society, and I assure you, it requires no little zeal and skill to make the discordant elements of which our church is composed, mingle. Excepting one or two little knots in the church they are strangers here from inland and outland, English radicals and daughters of Erin, Germans and Hollanders, philosophic gentiles and unbelieving Jews . . . in this our ass'n [association] where "of every living thing of all flesh, there is at least one of every sort."<sup>37</sup>

By the eighteen thirties Irish emigration had greatly accelerated, and Sedgwick foresaw potential social problems. Sedgwick would write:

Within seven miles east and west of the place where I am now writing, in Massachusetts, on its borders, (as we flatter ourselves, an enlightened portion of the United States,) there are, at this moment, a great number of Irish children, belonging to the laborers on the rail road. They are half savages, running about without employment and without instruction.

Catharine Sedgwick cautioned her readers that

These Irish children are, I know, now ignorant, dirty, rude, and repulsive; but in them you see the future citizens of your country; and on native Americans it must depend, whether they will prove the supporters or the violators of its laws--a blessing, or a scourge.<sup>38</sup>

The assimilation of recent immigrants and their contribution to the American national character continued to be themes as Sedgwick's writings. In 1853 she wrote about the contribution of these newcomers to the national character:

Providence has sent the starving hewers of wood & drawers of water from other lands to us . . . to be borne by the mighty wave of progress that is steadily tending onward & upward here. . . . There must be an amalgamation of various elements-- . . . A strange compound must come out of this--There is support for all living nature--A "Deil's bro" it will be--or

ambrosia for the gods--a perfecting  
& consummation of the species."<sup>39</sup>

Sedgwick believed that it was imperative to educate these immigrants and that American citizens should all assume this responsibility. Sedgwick's book, Means and Ends, includes specific, practical suggestions demonstrating how her readers might educate the children of the poor immigrants. She writes:

It is not necessary that you should fight battles, or turn politicians to be patriots. Here is a work of patriotism suited to the character and circumstances of Christian women. . . . Now, suppose some dozen or twenty good and sensible women in these neighborhoods were to associate together, and take upon themselves, in turn, the instruction of those children--teach them not only to read, write, and cypher, but acquaint them with the condition, and institutions of the country in which they are to live; sow the seeds of virtue and religion; train them to self-preserving habits, and subdue them to civilization. Four hours a week, given by each member of the society, might do this and would it not be a good work?<sup>40</sup>

Sedgwick did not overlook the forgotten people of her community, the destitute. She volunteered at the hospital for penniless New Yorkers, a grim place situated on Blackwell's Island. In a footnote to her book, Married or Single, she states that one of the characters is a composite of several girls she met at

the charity hospital. Jessie Manning, "her face young yet old," is left orphaned and homeless, literally on the street. A couple in evening dress steps passes by oblivious to her as she lies unconscious on the sidewalk. Her pet spaniel from better days stands over her until the night watchman finds her. She is carted off to Blackwell's Island, "where they send wretched women from wretched places. I was mistaken for one of them," she says.<sup>41</sup>

Conditions at the charity hospital were apparently equivalent to those at the dank and rat-infested prison known as "The Tombs" in downtown Manhattan. Married or Single? contains a description of a character's carriage ride to the Tombs, where her brother is incarcerated. It is a powerful cityscape, a reminder of the grimness of mid-nineteenth century urban life.

It was a drizzling, dirty evening. A feeble light from the lamps struggled through the foggy atmosphere; crowds of men were hurrying homeward from the business quarter. Overburdened women were carrying or dragging along lagging children; and here and there a drabbish-looking outcast, a frightful vestige of womanhood crouched against a wall. Omnibuses and vehicles of all sorts were in a crush, their wearied drivers shouting and swearing. "Oh, what a dreadful place!" she exclaimed. . . . "Oh, my poor brother in a prison in a city, itself a prison!"<sup>42</sup>

Sedgwick's visits to the Tombs were occasioned by her philanthropic work for the wives and children of prisoners. Despite an interest in prison reform, she believed that the safety of a community took precedence over the comfort of criminals. She fought a proposal to build a prison in her hometown of Stockbridge. She wrote a formal letter of protest to Dr. Thaddeus Pomeroy, one of the community leaders and her brother-in-law. This striking example of persuasive writing is in the archives of the Massachusetts Historical Society:

My dear Doctor--I am seldom bold enough to doubt the wisdom of your decisions, but it seems to me that your better judgment has been led captive by your humanity toward a portion of the Community who from having been the chief objects of desertion and despair have suddenly become the chief subjects of effort, hope, and christian love. . . . That you and other judicious and thinking and patriotic members of our village-society should have banded together to introduce into our still pastures, by our sweet-water courses, amid our flocks of defenseless sheep and lambs these State-prison wolves is, I confess, a mystery to me--I entreat you to reconsider the matter--to think how great a portion of our peace & happiness results from the safe character of our people, from the security with which we can go out and come in and lay our heads on our pillows at night.

She suggests an alternative site be found,

thinly inhabited, remote from villages that would be more suitable.--Has a colony ever

been thought of in some part of our fine unoccupied territory? In the name of Heaven let some other portion of this habitable globe be selected other than our village.

Her contention is "that the well being of the virtuous and moral of the community--those who have done nothing to forfeit their rights--ought first to be considered. Think of the amount of fear that will be inspired by these people." She begs Pomeroy to "Think of the defenseless of our community, composed as it is chiefly of women." She reminds him that one of those women is his wife and her old sister, Jane, and urges him not to "aid and abet" the project.<sup>43</sup>

There can be no better indication of Catharine Sedgwick's sincerity and dedication to the causes that she advocates in the novels than her involvement in charitable activities. Her interest in prison reform led her to found "The Women's Prison Association" in New York in 1848. In both New York and Boston she realized the ideas formulated in her book Means and Ends, by organizing groups of society women who would volunteer to teach reading and writing. Now called "English in Action," this organization still works with illiterate and non-English speaking city residents. In 1832 Sedgwick helped to start "a free school for some of the ten thousand children of this city," and she reports, "I was appointed to solicit

subscriptions."<sup>44</sup> At the same time she founded the "Society for the Aid and Relief of Poor Women," through which destitute women could earn money by sewing for wealthy women. The Society and the free school were community projects initiated by members of the Unitarian church which Sedgwick attended during her extended visits to the city. In a letter dated Monday 3 June 1850 there is a description of the "Society for the Aid and Relief of Poor Women":

I have just come from the House of Industry. . . . Poor women eagerly seeking the boon of 50 cts worth of work upon which--by their acct. [account] a sick husband and any number of "orphan children" are to be supported. The best of it all is to see the Ladies whose splended equipages stand at the door in close contact with these "exuberant" daughters of Erin--earnestly devoting themselves to their wants.--It will be a noble experiment.<sup>45</sup>

The Society continues to the present day as "The Society for the Aging," devoted to community service to New York. The organizations founded by Catharine Sedgwick perpetuate her efforts to help disadvantaged people.

Notes to Chapter VII

<sup>1</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Live and Let Live; or Domestic Service Illustrated (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1837), p. 91.

<sup>2</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Married or Single? (New York: Harpers, 1857), II, 107.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Halsey Foster, Catharine Maria Sedgwick (New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1974), p. 114.

<sup>4</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Means and Ends (Boston: Marsh, Capen, Lyon, & Webb, 1839), p. 267.

<sup>5</sup> Sedgwick, Means and Ends, p. 68.

<sup>6</sup> Sedgwick, Means and Ends, p. 270.

<sup>7</sup> Sedgwick, Means and Ends, p. 16.

<sup>8</sup> Sedgwick, pp. 14-15.

<sup>9</sup> Sedgwick, Married or Single?, vii.

<sup>10</sup> Journal, 18 May 1829, MS. This and all other journal and letters are in the Catharine Maria Sedgwick Papers, The Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Ma.

<sup>11</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick, "Old Maids," The Offering: A Christmas Present (Philadelphia, 1834), p. 20.

<sup>12</sup> Sedgwick, "Old Maids," p. 18.

<sup>13</sup> Sedgwick, Married or Single?, I, 132.

<sup>14</sup> Sedgwick, Married or Single?, I, 29; II, 204; vi.

<sup>15</sup> Sedgwick, Means and Ends, pp. 19, 268.

<sup>16</sup> Sedgwick, Means and Ends, p. 19.

<sup>17</sup> Sedgwick, Married or Single?, I, 214.

- 18 Journal, 16 March 1835, MS.
- 19 Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Hope Leslie (New York: White, Gallaher, and White, 1827), vi.
- 20 Catharine Maria Sedgwick, The Linwoods (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1835), I, 16.
- 21 Sedgwick, The Linwoods, I, 19.
- 22 Mary Dewey, ed. The Life and Letters of C. M. Sedgwick (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1871), p. 41.
- 23 Sedgwick, Linwoods, I, 221.
- 24 Sedgwick, Linwoods, I, 226.
- 25 Catharine Maria Sedgwick, "Berkeley Jail," The Atlantic Souvenir (New York: 1832), p. 24.
- 26 Sedgwick, Live and Let Live, p. 74.
- 27 Life and Letters, p. 63.
- 28 Sedgwick, Means and Ends, pp. 110, 112.
- 29 Sedgwick, Means and Ends, pp. 113, 114.
- 30 Sedgwick, Means and Ends, pp. 117-18.
- 31 Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Home (Boston: J. Munroe, 1835), p. 81.
- 32 Journal, Monday 27 May 1837, MS.
- 33 Journal, Weisbader, Wednesday, 14 August, 1839, MS.
- 34 Journal, June 1839, MS.
- 35 "Journal of Reminiscences," 1853, MS.
- 36 "Journal of Reminiscences," MS.
- 37 Letter to Eliza Cabot, New York City, 16 February 1832, ALS.
- 38 Sedgwick, Means and Ends, p. 263.
- 39 "Journal of Reminiscences," MS.

- 40 Sedgwick, Means and Ends, p. 265.
- 41 Sedgwick, Married or Single?, II, 24.
- 42 Sedgwick, Married or Single?, II, 122.
- 43 Letter to Dr. Thaddeus Pomeroy, New York, 29  
April 1832, ALS.
- 44 Letter to Eliza Cabot, 16 February 1823, ALS.
- 45 Letter to Kate Minot, New York, Monday, 3 June  
1850, ALS.

## CHAPTER VIII

### The Sustaining Vision

"You people that dwell in the clouds  
have always a mist before you."

"I remember very well the appearance of Miss Sedgwick," wrote William Cullen Bryant of his friend. "She was well formed, slightly inclining to plumpness, with regular features, eyes beaming with benevolence, a pleasing smile, a soft voice, and gentle and captivating manners."<sup>2</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, who knew her slightly, included Sedgwick among "The Literati of New York," (1846) the series commissioned by Godey's Lady's Book. Poe described Sedgwick as "about the medium height, perhaps a little below it. Her forehead is an unusually fine one; nose of a slightly Roman curve; eyes dark and piercing; mouth well formed and remarkably pleasant in its expression." He added that "Her manners are those of a high-bred woman, but her ordinary manner vacillates, in a singular way, between cordiality and a reserve amounting to hauteur." Poe wrote that Catharine Sedgwick "passes here [in New York] about half or more than half her time. Her home is in Stockbridge,

Massachusetts."<sup>3</sup> In fact, Sedgwick would never have a home of her own, but would divide her time between her relatives' homes in Manhattan and the Berkshires. She described herself as dependent on her family for financial support: "My fortune is not adequate to an independent establishment," she wrote in her journal, "but is it ample for ease to myself & liberality to others. In the families of all my brothers I have an agreeable home."<sup>4</sup> Sedgwick's circle of friends were the greatest writers of her day. Her life is as representative as her writings of her era in American literature.

New York and the Berkshires were both centers of literary activity. An authentic American literature, which Sedgwick's generation of writers had sought to produce, had been realized to a great extent by the middle of the nineteenth century.

In 1846 Poe wrote that "New York literature may be taken as a fair representation of that of the country at large. The city itself is the focus of American letters."<sup>5</sup> New York has some claim to the title of birthplace of American literature. Some of the early attempts at a native fiction, greatly indebted to British literary models though they were, had their origins in the city: Susanna Rowson's sentimental novel, Charlotte Temple, A Tale of Truth

(1791) was set on Randall's Island and Charles Brockden Brown's gothic novels were written in the city, the yellow fever epidemic of 1798 providing the inspiration for Arthur Merwyn.<sup>6</sup> An important part of the national heritage of non-fiction writings was New York journalism, such as the Federalist Papers and the pamphlets of the immigrant Tom Paine. The poets Freneau, Bryant, Poe, and Whitman would all find work as newspapermen in the city where they made their home. Irving, Cooper, and Melville were also New Yorkers . By the 1840s Irving had returned from Spain and Cooper had left the clamour of Manhattan to retire in Rockland County. Irving visited Sedgwick in Stockbridge and the city.<sup>7</sup> The two writers were by now on good terms, although years earlier Sedgwick had expressed her disdain for her rival's work.

In 1823, just before the publication of her second novel, Redwood, Sedgwick had written to Eliza Cabot, a friend living in Boston:

We are amazed at your admiration of The Pioneers which in our ignorance and simplicity we had fancied for the most part a vulgar and tiresome production--certainly with the exception of the fine panther scene--some touches in Natty's character and Kirby's--The author has spirit and invention and if he had only some education refinement & modesty he might write charmingly.<sup>8</sup>

Poe had moved from the farmhouse on West 84 Street and was living in a cottage in the Bronx when he described Sedgwick for Godney's Lady's Book. Melville and Sedgwick saw each other on Sundays at the First Unitarian Church. Her close friend Bryant was another member of the congregation. Whitman was living in a rooming house on Centre Street. He and Sedgwick were not acquainted.<sup>9</sup>

The Berkshires had been the home of the eighteenth-century scholars, the Connecticut Wits, whose attempts to create an American literature in the linguistic tradition of Addison and Pope included the epic poems The Columbiad and Conquest of Canaan. The New England region was also the source of the most significant literary achievement of "The American Renaissance" which F.O. Matthiessen defines, "Not as a re-birth of values that had existed previously in America, but as America's way of producing a renaissance, by coming to its first maturity and affirming its rightful heritage in the whole expanse of art and culture."<sup>10</sup> The Sedgwick home in Stockbridge became the gathering place for writers associated with the American Renaissance: Hawthorne, Emerson, Alcott, Channing, Theodore Parker, Margaret Fuller. Fuller, according to Ann Douglas, liked Sedgwick's "freedom from sentimentality, her common

sense, her interest in history."<sup>11</sup> Foster writes:  
 "With the notable exception of Thoreau, Whitman, and  
 Poe--virtually every American author of note attended  
 afternoon tea with Miss Sedgwick."<sup>12</sup>

Poe was one of Sedgwick's less enthusiastic critics, yet his reviews indicate her enormous success in the mid-nineteenth century. Poe tempered his praise because he attributed part of her fame to the fact that she had published in hard cover, which gave her an advantage "over her more modern rivals whom fashion and the growing influence of the want of an international copyright law had condemned to the external insignificance of the yellow-back pamphleteering." Poe also discerned that part of her success hinged upon her place in history, a place which, in 1846, he evidently viewed as secure. He wrote that "Miss Sedgwick is not only one of our most celebrated and meritorious writers, but attained reputation at a period when American reputation in letters was regarded as a phenomenon."<sup>13</sup> A decade earlier, in 1835, Poe had written in the Southern Literary Messenger:

Miss Sedgwick is one among the few American writers who have risen by merely their own intrinsic talents, and without the a priori aid of foreign opinion and puffery, to any exalted rank in the opinion of our countrymen. She is at the same time deserving of

all the popularity she has attained. By those who are most fastidious in matter of literary criticism, the author of Hope Leslie is the most ardently admired, and we are acquainted with few persons of sound and accurate discriminations who would hesitate in placing her upon a level with the best of our native novelists. Of American female writers we must consider her the first.<sup>14</sup>

In "The Literati" Poe named as works "of great merit" Sedgwick's didactic trilogy and her "various articles for the magazines and annuals, to which she is still an industrious contributor."<sup>15</sup> In a letter to Dr. Channing, Catharine Sedgwick attempts to describe the experience of being famous:

It is not a privilege to have made a name which opens the doors of strangers to your friends as well as to yourself. It is not true that love always casts out fear--Probably because some imperfection attaches to it. We erect barriers about ourselves & then are all our lives complaining that we cannot overleap them. In my early intercourse with you I participated the vulgar feeling in relation to your superiority & was awed by it, not knowing that that was the very circumstance that should have drawn me nearer.<sup>16</sup>

Catharine Sedgwick's close friends were few. She corresponded extensively with her confidantes, Eliza Cabot Lee Follen, the wife of a Unitarian minister, and with her sisters-in-law, Susan Anne Livingston Ridley Sedgwick, the didactic novelist married to

Theodore, and Elizabeth Buckminster Dwight Sedgwick, Charles' wife and founder of the Lenox School.

In 1832 Catharine Sedgwick attended a performance of Romeo and Juliet, starring the famous British actress, Fanny Kemble. Dolley Madison, John Quincy Adams, and President Andrew Jackson were also in the audience and the reception that followed. Sedgwick commented in her journal that the actress "was not entirely free from the little affectations and prettiness of the stage." Sedgwick added: "Altogether she has the air of a gentlewoman. She has the most flattering way of listening--slightly inclining forward and seeming to listen as much with her eye as her ear--She is slightly deaf, she says."<sup>17</sup> For a time the actress would be a frequent guest of the Sedgwicks.

Fanny Kemble was to become a controversial figure in American history. Unlike Sedgwick, she was an Abolitionist. Nevertheless she married the owner of two Georgian plantations and 700 slaves, a Philadelphian named Pierce Butler. In 1838 she persuaded her husband to take her to Butler's Island of the Georgia Coast and there she wrote a very dramatic condemnation of slavery, entitled Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation. She published it in 1863, against the advice of the Sedgwicks. Betsey Fancher describes it as "the book which some Georgians

still believe prevented England's intervention in the Civil War and determined the defeat of the South."

Sedgwick worried that her admiration for the actress was excessive. She wrote in her journal:

Am I wrong in giving so much time & thought to her? My conscience is not easy. . . . I sent her to Dr. Channing's discourses--I think it possible some chance seed may spring up in the rich soil of her mind--She came to see me in the afternoon--She was full of sad & disquieting thoughts. She seemed to feel the sorrows & burdens of a woman's existence.<sup>19</sup>

"I have troupes of friends--some devotedly attached to me," wrote Catharine Sedgwick. "I have always felt myself to be an object of attention, respect, & regard. In the families of all my brothers I have an agreeable home. My sisters are all kind & affectionate to me--my brothers generous & invariably kind."<sup>20</sup> Yet there is a somber tone in Sedgwick's private papers that is at odds with the optimism implicit in her didactic works and her charitable activities. "Is there anything sadder than files of old family letters, where one seems to spell backwards one's own future?" asks the narrator of Sedgwick's last work of fiction, Married or Single? "It is a world of shadows, reads one entry in her journal. "I seem to myself the most fleeting among them."<sup>21</sup> In December of 1832, on the first page of a new notebook,

she writes: "I began this blank book with melancholy interest. If its pages are ever filled some of them must be written in tears--some I trust in smiles of happiness & gratitude to that great Being who has marked my life with mercy."<sup>22</sup> In another entry she writes, "I ought I know to be grateful & humble & I do hope through the grace of God to rise more above the world--to attain a higher & happier state of feeling--to order my house for that better world where self may lose something of its engrossing power." She expresses her sadness in cadences that suggest she had been reading Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality," or Keats' "Ode to Autumn."

Again the spring is here--the season of life & loveliness--the beautiful emblem of our resurrection into life eternal. . . . I will not stay with the ungracious fact that I turn from what spring brings to what she cannot bring, but alas, I find there is no longer that capacity for swelling, springing, and brightening joy that I once felt. All is not right with me I know. I still build on sandy foundations. I still hope for perfection where perfection is not given. The best sources of Earthly happiness are not within my grasp. Those of contentment I have neglected.<sup>23</sup>

In May of 1837 she confided in her diary: "I have felt the sorrow that breaks my heart. . . . I have wept alone & in secret wishing for no sympathy, and only daring to ask God's compassion."<sup>24</sup> She was

convinced that a husband could have spared her from the loneliness and fear of being abandoned that haunted her throughout her life. She calls "a solitary condition--an unnatural state."<sup>25</sup> Deeply affected by "Milton's article on divorce," Sedgwick set down her feelings on the subject of marriage in a letter to her friend Eliza Cabot:

After all, Eliza, I doubt that there are any so far spiritualized on Earth as to invest that union with all the happiness of which it appears capable--but that is saying nothing--there is nothing so good as it might be, none of God's good gifts perfected--and perhaps--and without a perhaps, marriage is undoubtedly the most happy the most virtuous, the most exalted condition of human life."<sup>26</sup>

Sedgwick closed the letter with the unheeded request that it be destroyed: "I have written strangely--and I wish, dear Eliza, you would burn this letter right up for I have an awful dread of ridicule." In response to a loving letter from her nephew, William Minot, Jr. the sixty-four-year-old Sedgwick revealed that

for the hardest trick of single life I was unprepared--What little fame I may have had--& general consideration--has not been the slightest compensation to me for the loss of that instinctive tenderness so like Divine love--that which needs no suggestion of sense of duty but acts spontaneously with all the qualities of fire but its destructiveness.<sup>27</sup>

Sedgwick's novels invariably end with the conventional wedding of the hero and heroine, but a character in Married or Single? says in defense of the heroine who has rejected an eligible suitor:

"Surely it is better to be a lonely struggler, an 'old maid' driven into corners, than to sacrifice her truth, to live in the closest and dearest relation of life, stripped of all that makes life dear. Better utter isolation or desertion, than to perjure herself by a vow of love, honor, and obedience, that she cannot keep."<sup>28</sup>

Sedgwick observed in a letter to Eliza Cabot that happy marriages are few, which she saw as "certainly not a consolation, but an admonition to contentment." When she was only twenty six years old she wrote to her sister, Frances Watson:

"The great disadvantage and the only reproach of a single life, is that we poor spinsters are generally condemned to uselessness, and Satan availing himself of his prerogative finds a mischief still, for idle hands to do"--It has always, and I pray it may ever be my happy destiny to have employment enough to keep me out of danger of falling into the folly of repining, or the meanness of envying."<sup>29</sup>

In her later years Sedgwick's time was filled with the charitable activities for which she was praised by her peers: One of her acquaintances who had accompanied her to hospitals and prisons "especially the Tombs, Blackwell's and Randall's

Island" in New York City remarked: "In her visitations, she was called upon to kneel at the bedside of the sick and dying. The sweetness of her spirit, and the delicacy of her nature, felt by all who came within her atmosphere, seemed to move the unfortunate to ask this office of her, and it was never asked in vain."<sup>30</sup> Seth Curtis Beach comments: "During the first half of the nineteenth century Miss Sedgwick would doubtless have been considered the queen of American letters, but, in the opinion of her friends, the beauty of her character surpassed the merit of her books."<sup>31</sup> Bryant would write in her obituary: "Admirable as was her literary life, her home life was more so; and beautiful as were the examples set forth in her writings, her own example was, if possible, still more beautiful." He praised "her unerring sense of rectitude, her love of truth, her ready sympathy, her active and cheerful beneficence, her winning and gracious manners, the perfection of high breeding."<sup>32</sup>

Catharine Sedgwick lived to see the emergence of an authentic American literature. She also witnessed the Civil War that brought to an end America's Romantic Period. She wrote of her "intense desire to live to see the conclusion of the struggle," although she could not believe that "peace and good neighborhood are ever to follow from this bitter

hate."<sup>33</sup> She spent her last decade as a semi-invalid in the home of her niece, Mrs. William Minot Jr., in West Roxbury, Massachusetts. She had outlived all her brothers and sisters. Two weeks before her death at the age of seventy-eight she wrote: "I have a balcony out of Kate's window in the pine wood, where I lie all day. And where the mercies and love of God are continually pressing upon my senses. But 'tis hard work . . . to be sick, and helpless, and useless!"<sup>34</sup> She died on July 31, 1867 and was buried beside her childhood nurse, Elizabeth Freeman. In her journals she expressed a "distinct anticipation of a reunion" with her family after death. She wrote: "I seem sometimes to catch the glimmering light of another morning."<sup>35</sup>

In her letters and journals she seldom referred to her career as a writer, but on one occasion she wrote:

"My author existence has always seemed accidental, extraneous & independent of my inner self. My books have been a pleasant occupation & excitement in my life--The notice & friends or acquaintances they have procured me have relieved me from the danger of ennui & blue devils that are most apt to infest a single person--But they constitute no portion of my happiness--That is of such as I derive from the dearest relation of life--When I feel that my writings have made any one happier or better I feel an emotion of gratitude to Him who has made me the medium of any blessing to my fellow creatures--and I do feel I am but the instrument."<sup>36</sup>

Notes to Chapter VIII

<sup>1</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Hope Leslie (New York: White, Gallaher, and White, 1827), I, 230.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Dewey, ed., Life and Letters of C.M. Sedgwick (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1871), p. 438.

<sup>3</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, "The Literati of New York," in The Complete Works, ed. James A. Harrison (New York: T.Y. Crowell and Company, 1902) XIV, 113.

<sup>4</sup> Journal, 18 May 1829, MS. This and all other journals and letters are in the Catharine Maria Sedgwick Papers, The Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Ma.

<sup>5</sup> Poe, "The Literati," XIV, 115.

<sup>6</sup> Susan Edustion and Lurda D. Cirino, Literary New York: A History and Guide (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Holsey Foster, Catharine Maria Sedgwick (New York: Twayne, 1974), p. 20.

<sup>8</sup> Journal, 18 April 1823, MS.

<sup>9</sup> Edustion and Cirino, pp. 248, 24.

<sup>10</sup> F.O. Mattheissen, The American Renaissance (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), vii.

<sup>11</sup> Ann Douglas, The Feminization of American Culture (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), p. 268.

<sup>12</sup> Foster, p. 36.

<sup>13</sup> Poe, "The Literati," XIV, III, 108.

<sup>14</sup> Poe, Review, II, 94-5.

<sup>15</sup> Poe, "The Literati," XIV, 109.

<sup>16</sup> Letter to Dr. Channing, New York, 27 April 1939, ALS.

- 17 Journal, 11 February 1832.
- 18 Betsy Fancher, The Lost Legacy of Georgia's Golden Isles (New York: Doubleday, 1971).
- 19 Journal, Wednesday, 20 February, 1833, MS.
- 20 Journal, 18 May 1829, MS.
- 21 Journal, Saturday, 17 November 1832, MS.
- 22 Journal, December 1832, MS.
- 23 Journal, 18 May, 1829, MS.
- 24 Journal, 20 May, 1837, MS.
- 25 Journal, 18 May, 1829, MS.
- 26 Letter to Eliza Cabot, 29 June, 1829, ALS.
- 27 Letter to William Minot, Jr., Lenox, 15 May 1853, ALS.
- 28 Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Married or Single? (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1857), II, 81.
- 29 Letter to Mrs. Watson, Albany, 25 March 1816, ALS.
- 30 Seth Curtis Beach, Daughters of the Puritans (Freeport, N.Y.: Books for Libraries Press, 1995), p. 34.
- 31 Beach, p. 6.
- 32 Beach, pp. 38-39.
- 33 Beach, p. 36.
- 34 Life and Letters, p. 411.
- 35 Journal, Sunday Evening, 2 December 1832, MS.
- 36 Journal, 20 December 1836, MS.

## Afterword

Presentiment--is that long Shadow--on the Lawn--  
Indicative that Suns go down--

The Notice to the startled Grass  
That Darkness--is about to pass--<sup>2</sup>

Emily Dickinson

Catharine Maria Sedgwick was one of the first American novelists to achieve international popularity. Her novels, A New-England Tale, Redwood, and Hope Leslie were enthusiastically received by critics and the general public and her didactic tales were best sellers. Although her contemporaries credited her with helping to establish the American literary tradition, her contribution is now overlooked.

Sedgwick's books are valuable as historical records. They serve as indicators of popular tastes in fiction and provided detailed descriptions that help us to visualize everyday life in early nineteenth-century New England and New York. Her letters and journals add another dimension to Sedgwick's interpretation of her era, a viewpoint that is particularly enlightening because her circle of

friends included most of the authors of the "American Renaissance."

The role that Catharine Sedgwick played in American literary history was a significant one. She was greeted as one of the first native fiction writers to accurately portray the American scene. The twentieth-century critic, Richard D. Birdsall, calls Sedgwick one of the "pathfinders in the creation of a national literature."<sup>2</sup>

Although there existed a colonial heritage of non-fiction writings, fiction in the United States initially consisted of British writings and generally inferior imitations of British works. Catharine Sedgwick was among the writers who endeavored, as she expressed it, "to add something to the scanty stock of American literature."<sup>3</sup> In the 1820's works by Sedgwick, Bryant, Cooper, and Irving were praised by critics on both sides of the Atlantic. International recognition offered Americans a separate cultural identity, important to a new nation in its formative years. Sedgwick's anonymously published novel, Redwood, at first mistaken by French critics for a work by Cooper, was subsequently translated into Swedish, German, and Italian, as well as French.<sup>4</sup> Bryant saw Redwood "as a conclusive argument that the writers of works of fiction, of which the scene is

laid in familiar and domestic life, have a rich and varied field before them in the United States."<sup>5</sup>

Hawthorne praised Sedgwick's work and described her as "our most truthful novelist."<sup>6</sup>

Sedgwick's novels exemplify what her generation of Americans found relevant and diverting. Her genre, the romance, was representative of emerging American fiction. Like her successors Hawthorne and Melville, Sedgwick focused on ideas rather than the social interaction which characterized the British novel of manners. Sedgwick chose small-town settings that were unmistakably American. The Transcendentalists' affinity with nature was reflected in her reverent descriptions of the Berkshire hills. In A New-England Tale the trend toward religious liberalism in America was represented in fiction by the author's explication of her Unitarian faith. Sedgwick's second novel, Redwood, depicts sectional and class distinctions in the early years of the United States, antipathy between Northerners and Southerners, farmers and wealthy city-dwellers. The book also includes a prototypical anti-hero and a Yankee spinster. Hope Leslie, generally considered Sedgwick's best novel, celebrates a shared colonial past. This historical novel is set in a Puritan colony during the Pequod Indian Wars. The book was innovative in having a

realistically portrayed Indian woman as the central character.

Sedgwick's heroines are all "enthusiasts" who embody selflessness and incorruptability. They all marry at the conclusion of the novels, and this the author describes as "the most practical proof of our allegiance to the ancient laws of romance."<sup>7</sup> Democratic ideals also pervade Sedgwick's books, ideals which she was confident would be realized in the United States. Hard work and virtue are rewarded in her fiction by happiness and social progress. Sedgwick hoped that her books would "further human virtue and improvement."<sup>8</sup> The didactic element had always been present in Sedgwick's writing, but her desire to benefit society ultimately became her *raison d'etre*. It was Sedgwick's belief that "there are no distinctions in America which are certain and permanent but those of education and character,"<sup>9</sup> and to illustrate this principle she wrote didactic tales with working class heroes and heroines. These stories were recommended by educators and clergymen and were widely read and admired until the turn of the century. Her publishers, Harper and Brothers, called Sedgwick's trilogy of didactic novels "one of the most popular series of works ever published."<sup>10</sup>

With the success of her popular didactic fiction, Sedgwick opened the door for numerous women authors of lucrative sentimental novels. "American is now wholly given over to a damned mob of scribbling women," wrote Hawthorne.<sup>11</sup> "The domestic novels, in Russel Nye's definition, "taught women how to run a home and handle a husband."<sup>12</sup> Unlike writers such as "Fanny Fern," Susan Warner, and Mrs. E.D.E.N. Southworth, Sedgwick wrote with care and restraint, and she focused on social and philosophical issues as well as family life. "Miss Sedgwick wrote for her time with conscious moral purpose," observe Richard E. Welch, Jr.: "she was the most popular American female novelist before Harriet Beecher Stowe."<sup>13</sup>

In the twentieth century Catharine Sedgwick's contribution to the history of American literature would be virtually forgotten. In her own time her novels were almost overshadowed by her best-selling didactic tales, which in turn were obscured by the domestic novels of the popular women writers. Sentimental didactic fiction itself fell out of favor and Sedgwick's books ceased to be reprinted. Sedgwick had intended to capture her era in print, "to denote the passing character of a time and place,"<sup>14</sup> and her contemporaries praised her books for their authenticity. But succeeding generations would find

little in her novels with which to identify, because they are about a vanished way of life and a largely abandoned set of values. Her solutions to social problems would seem unworkable from a twentieth-century perspective. Her subject matter was often too particular or too ephemeral to have lasting relevance. Yet the very qualities that caused her books to become outdated would make them valuable as historical records. The potentially confusing diversity and complexity of her age can be assimilated through the study of this forgotten author who encapsulated in her fiction currents of thought central to her generation.

During Sedgwick's lifetime Whitman and Longfellow provided Americans with a native poetry while Emily Dickinson was composing her legacy to the twentieth century. Hawthorne and Melville demonstrated new possibilities in the novel form. The American version of Idealism, expressed by Emerson and Thoreau, was gaining enduring worldwide recognition. The distinguished writers of the era, most of whom attended Sedgwick's tea parties in Stockbridge, were the founders of the American literary tradition. Sedgwick was a pioneer, but she was not a writer of genius. The plots of her novels lack unity, and the action is too often upstaged by the author's message. There are powerful moments--tableaux vividly

described, as if suspended in time. Without the sustained action that Aristotle named as a prerequisite, Sedgwick delineates characters by amassing details and well-chosen vignettes. She catches the nuances of various dialects and invents lifelike, witty dialogue. The elegance and directness of her language set her apart from the fiction writers of the Federalist period. Her writing has something of Benjamin Franklin's simplicity and it avoids the syntactic convolutions of her rival, James Fenimore Cooper. Sedgwick was one of the first American novelists to build upon British literary models, rather than merely imitate them, and she fashioned her novels out of the experience of living in America. A century and a half after they were written, her books are pleasant to read.

The value of Sedgwick's work today is not primarily aesthetic. She was rightfully eclipsed by other writers of fiction. Her books are important as history. In the eyes of her contemporaries she was a pioneer in the creation of an authentic American literature. Her books are examples of the best-selling fiction of her day. For modern readers, Sedgwick's writings are sources of information about daily life in her time, popular sentiments, and current events. They magnify our historical

perspective. A function of the novelist, Balzac suggested, is his or her role as historian. Robert E. Spiller writes that literature allows us special insight into social and intellectual history, not as documentation, but as symbolic illumination."<sup>15</sup> Sedgwick creates almost photographic likenesses of nineteenth-century America.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Emily Dickinson, "No. 764," in The Norton Anthology of American Literature, shorter edition, ed. Ronald Gottesman, et al. (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1979), p. 937.

<sup>2</sup> Richard D. Birdsall, "W.C. Bryant and Catherine [sic] Sedgwick," New England Quarterly, Sept. 1955, p. 371.

<sup>3</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick, A New-England Tale (New York: E. Bliss and E. White, 1822), iv.

<sup>4</sup> Birdsall, p. 370.

<sup>5</sup> William Cullen Bryant, "Review of Redwood," North American Review, Apr. 1825, p. 248.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Halsey Foster, Catharine Maria Sedgwick (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974), p. 20.

<sup>7</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Married or Single? (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1857), vi.

<sup>8</sup> Sedgwick, A New-England Tale, iv.

<sup>9</sup> Catharine Maria Sedgwick, Means and Ends (Boston: Marsh, Capen, Lyon, and Webb, 1839), p. 15.

<sup>10</sup> Foster, p. 117.

<sup>11</sup> Russel Nye, The Unembarrassed Muse: The Popular Arts in America (New York: The Dial Press, 1970), p. 22.

<sup>12</sup> Nye, p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> Richard e. Welch, Jr., "Sedgwick, Catharine Maria," Notable American Women (1971), III, 258.

<sup>14</sup> Sedgwick, A New-England Tale, iv.

<sup>15</sup> Robert E. Spiller, The Cycle of American Literature (New York: Dell, 1958), ix.

## APPENDIX

Catharine Maria Sedgwick, her native Stockbridge, and Magawisca, the heroine of Hope Leslie are celebrated by Mrs. Lydia Howard Huntley Sigourney, a very popular poet of mid-nineteenth century America:

### The Stockbridge Bowl

The Stockbridge Bowl! - Hast ever seen  
How sweetly pure and bright  
Its foot of stone, and rim of green,  
Attract the traveller's sight?  
High set among the breezy hills  
Where spotless marble glows,  
It takes the tribute of the rills  
Distilled from mountain snows.

You've seen, perchance, the classic vase  
At Adrian's villa found,  
The grape-vines that its handles chase,  
And twine its rim around,  
But thousands such as that which boasts  
The Roman's name to keep,  
Might in this Stockbridge bowl be lost  
Like pebbles in the deep.

It yields no sparkling draught of fire  
To mock the maddened brain,  
Like that which warmed Anacreon's lyre  
Amid the Tean plain;  
But freely, with a right good-will,  
Imparts its fountain stone,  
Whose heaven replenished crystal still  
Can wearied toil restore.

The Indian hunter knew its power,  
And oft its praises spoke,  
Long ere the white-man's stranger plough  
These western vallies broke;

The panting deer, that wild with pain,  
 From his pursuer stole,  
 Inhaled new life to every vein  
 From this same Stockbridge bowl.

And many a son of Berkshire skies,  
 Those men of noble birth,  
 Though now, perchance, their roofs may rise  
 In far, or foreign earth,--  
 Shall on this well-remembered vase  
 With thrilling bosom gaze,  
 And o'er its mirrored surface trace  
 Poor Magawiska start,  
 Hath won a fame, whose blossom rare  
 Shall fear no blighting sky,  
 Whose lustrous leaf grow fresh and fair,  
 Though Stockbridge bowl be dry.<sup>1</sup>

The poem was accompanied by this paragraph:

In the northern part of Stockbridge, Berkshire County, is a beautiful expanse of water, usually called the "Great Pond" which in many countries would be dignified with the appellation of a lake. Its original Indian name of "Quit-chu-scook" is scarcely melodious enough for its singular loveliness. Miss Sedgwick, whose birth is counted among the glories of the region, says, "The English equivalent to this aboriginal word 'The Bowl' is short, simple, and perfectly descriptive." No bowl was ever more beautifully formed or set, not ever even in old Homer's genial verse, sparkled more invitingly.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. L. H. Sigourney, Scenes in My Native Land  
 (Boston: James Munroe and Company, 1844) pp. 200-201.

<sup>2</sup> Sigourney, p. 201.

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