The Illustrated Charlotte Temple and Her Readers

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In 1809 Philadelphia printer Mathew Carey issued his sixth edition of Susanna Rowson’s seduction novel *Charlotte Temple: A Tale of Truth*, in which he included for the first time an original stipple-engraved portrait of the novel’s title character as a frontispiece (Figure 1). This portrait provided an emotional touchstone for readers, and soon other printers began to include frontispiece portraits and other illustrations in their editions of *Charlotte Temple*. By midcentury these images contributed to the novel’s curious afterlife: a readerly cult dedicated to grieving for the novel’s heroine, who they were encouraged by the author to regard as a real English schoolgirl who was seduced and abandoned to die in New York during the Revolutionary War. The cult of Charlotte persisted over the course of the nineteenth century, and printers and publishers used the illustrations both to encourage and capitalize on the readerly devotion for their heroine. The purpose of this article is to examine how several illustrated editions of the novel published between 1808 and 1905 engaged their readers and contributed to making *Charlotte Temple* one of the greatest steady-sellers in nineteenth-century America.

First published anonymously to little notice in 1791 by Minerva Press in England as *Charlotte: A Tale of Truth*, and reprinted in Philadelphia in 1794 by Mathew Carey in an edition that names “Mrs. Rowson” as its author, the novel ultimately went to nearly 200 editions and remained in print continuously to the present. After its transatlantic resurrection, this melodramatic little novel inspired a huge following of readers throughout the new republic, and its popularity remained an American phenomenon; bibliographer R. W. G. Vail in 1933 located 158 editions, all but nine of

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which were published in the United States. Readers were encouraged by the author to read the book as a thinly veiled account of a real English girl. And though debate about this truth claim continued throughout the nineteenth century, critics and readers were still enthusiastically defending it as late as 1905. Readerly commemoration of their heroine took on aspects of devotional practice, inspiring readers to make impassioned inscriptions in their copies of the book—Cathy Davidson records that one reader simply but ecstatically wrote “My Treasure” in an “otherwise pristine” 1809 edition—and to make pilgrimages to a gravesite at Trinity Church.

Since Cathy Davidson called for renewed attention to the forgotten novels of the new republic in her seminal Revolution and the Word (1984), there has been considerable critical attention given to Charlotte Temple and to Rowson as an important figure in American letters in the 1790s. Shirley Samuels and Cathy Davidson, among others, have argued for a reading of the seduction novel in early America as an allegory of revolution and nation-building, placing the family drama at the heart of the seduction novel in direct correlation to the relationship between the colonies and England, or between the new nation and its citizen subjects. As Samuels summarizes this position, “The seduction of women in popular eighteenth-century novels like Susannah Rowson’s Charlotte Temple (1791) and Hannah Foster’s The Coquette (1797) clearly conflates national and bodily symbolics.” I contend that while later readerly engagement certainly inscribes this interpretation onto Charlotte Temple, the novel does not lend itself easily to this reading. Davidson herself complicates the claim for a nationally shared allegorical reading of the novel in her 2004 introduction to the twentieth-anniversary edition of Revolution and the Word, asking, “Is reading the same book sharing a culture? . . . whenever one evokes a ‘shared national culture’ the question must be asked: Shared by whom? It further must be asked: And shared in what way?” Part of my argument here is that the illustrations perform a significant role in the integration of the novel into a national story, both in conjunction with and independent of the novel they illustrate.

Despite conventional wisdom about the predominantly female readership of sentimental fiction, Charlotte Temple’s readership transcended bounds of class and education, gender, region, and age. Inscriptions in archival copies assert the ownership of both men and women of all ages, and reveal networks of exchange between mothers and sons, fathers and daughters, grandparents and grandchildren, men and women, boys and girls. In 1870, Rowson’s biographer Elias Nason described Charlotte Temple’s readers in terms that recall Walt Whitman’s vision of American democracy:
It has stolen its way alike into the study of the divine and into the workshop of the mechanic; into the parlor of the accomplished lady and the bed-chamber of her waiting maid; into the log-hut on the extreme border of modern civilization and into the forecastle of the whale ship on the lonely ocean. It has been read by the grey-bearded professor after his “divine Plato;” and by the beardless clerk after balancing his accounts at night; by the traveler waiting for the next conveyance at the village inn; by the school girl stealthfully in her seat at school. It has beguiled the woodman in his hut at night in the deep solitudes of the silent forest; it has cheated the farmer’s son of many an hour while poring over its fascinating pages, seated on the broken spinning wheel in the old attic; it has drawn tears from the miner’s eye in the dim twilight of his subterranean dwelling; it has unlocked the secret sympathies of the veteran soldier in his tent before the day of battle.

This readerly community eventually made Charlotte Temple not only “the single most popular fictional figure of the early national period” but also one of the best-loved and best-remembered figures of Revolutionary War-era New York.

Along with the energetic advertising employed by Carey and other early publishers of *Charlotte Temple*, printers used illustrations to supplement their editions. I have identified seventy-two editions containing illustrations (see bibliographic appendix), beginning with Carey’s 1809 reprint and ending with Francis W. Halsey’s 1905 Funk and Wagnalls edition, the first scholarly edition of the novel. The first portrait, an original engraving by Cornelius Tiebout, a New York–born engraver who did other work for Carey, including plates for his *Family Bible* (1803–5), was eventually copied in other editions.

As the novel continued to appear in single editions and as part of novel series marketed to adults, *Charlotte Temple* enjoyed a parallel life in the juvenile book market throughout the nineteenth century. While readership remained promiscuous, with many adult readers still engaging Charlotte’s story, and many young readers taking up texts not necessarily marketed to them, *Charlotte Temple* joined canonical works like *Gulliver’s Travels*, *Clarissa*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* that, as they became outmoded as adult literature made a transition, often in abridged forms, to the bookshelves of younger readers. For example, an 1804 primer includes an advertisement for chapbook editions of *Charlotte Temple* and *Robinson Crusoe* along with “Picture Books for Children,” suggesting that these novels were regarded as likely next steps for young readers.
of Charlotte Temple included advertising for juvenile books as early as 1811 and continued to do so into the twentieth century. Fisher and Brother, a Philadelphia “Juvenile Book House” founded in 1824, included both Charlotte and Lucy Temple in their bound juvenile catalogue, which they offered along with songbooks, dime books, riddle books, and Mother Goose stories from their print shop at No. 9 North Sixth Street in Philadelphia. Yellow-back chapbook editions that were clearly marketed for young readers were a staple of the novel’s midcentury circulation.

Illustration has been a hallmark of children’s literature since the eighteenth century. According to Patricia Crain, the “spread of cheap books for children, and the increasing acceptance of sensationalist psychology, especially through [John] Locke’s” Some Thoughts Concerning Education (1693), one of the most influential books in the colonies,” made images a powerful tool in child-rearing. Locke recommended that activities for children related to abecedarian pedagogy should not “be made a burden to them or imposed on them as a task,” but should rather be on a continuum with children’s play, and encouraged parents and educators to make reading and learning to read not just necessary tasks but extensions of the activities children already enjoyed. “I have always had a fancy that learning might be made a play and a recreation to children; and that they might be brought to desire to be taught.” To that end, Locke encouraged the use of playthings and illustrated texts that would engage the child’s imagination. As Gillian Brown describes, eighteenth-century printers of children’s books, in particular John Newberry, deployed Locke’s idea to great effect. The Newberry tradition of children’s books followed Locke’s prescription for illustration that would both stimulate the imaginative faculty and direct it toward learning and proper socialization. By the late eighteenth century, Romanticism’s idealization of childhood, which emphasized the imaginative faculty as the principle perceptive mechanism through which children and certain special adults engaged the world, was gaining ground. Artists and educationalists who adapted Lockean sensationalism to Romanticism’s ends suggested that writing and illustrations for children should stimulate this faculty for its own sake.

The illustrations that appear in Charlotte Temple seem to participate more in the Romantic imaginative tradition than in a pedagogical mode, encouraging a creative interplay between text and reader that does not necessarily participate in the novel’s didactic agenda; but these illustrations also serve to guide the reader into the text, pointing him or her to key moments in the story, and encouraging identification with the novel’s heroine. Nineteenth-century adult readers whose abecedarian education was rooted in Lockeana
pedagogy, and whose adult reading was influenced by the Romantic revision of Lockean sensationalism, would also naturally respond to illustrations, a notion attested to by the multiple adult market editions that contain both portraits and tableaux. In fact, one of the most heavily illustrated editions of the novel, the 1831 London reprint, is an unabridged edition that was marketed to an adult readership. Adult editions of other books—from Dickens’s novels to *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*—contained illustrations, including and beyond the frontispiece, throughout the nineteenth century.

Tableaux are the most common form of illustration for books—any scene of arrested action, after all, constitutes a tableau. The engravers and printers who illustrated *Charlotte Temple* used tableaux to great effect to give their imagined ideal reader guideposts for moments of sympathetic identification at key moments in the text. Thus, the illustrations function much the same way as Rowson’s didactic passages in which she interpellates her “Dear Reader” and directs the reader’s attention to particular moments in the text where his or her sentimental faculty can be stimulated. The interaction of the reader with the illustrations and with the physical object of the book creates an imaginary space of pure feeling where the sentimental faculty supersedes the other senses. This is not unlike the “virtual cell” Martha Dana Rust describes in her discussion of readers’ interactions with medieval illuminated books: “a physical book held in a reader’s gaze would function to ‘bring forth’ the kind of space Martin Heidegger has termed a ‘locale’: a space that enables being and thinking,” or, in this case, a space of being and feeling in which the reader enters, in Heidegger’s terms, “in simple one-ness into things.” The tableaux illustrations enable the reader to visualize this space, to witness the novel’s action projected within a locale defined between the reader’s gaze and the plane of the page.

Some of these “feeling moments” are more ambiguous than others; moments of crisis and degradation can serve to titillate as well as to educate, one of the moral perils of the sentimental in all its iterations. This problem was central to eighteenth-century antinovel propaganda, and is only exacerbated by illustrations that draw readers’ attention to sensational passages in the novel. The implicit intimacy of this mode of consumerism—implicating author, publisher, and the consuming public in a collaboration to produce this space of sentimental excess—may also have made some publishers uneasy with oversensationalizing or politicizing the allegorical potential of the works on offer, as they sometimes used illustrations to defer its referent into a more historically distant social context or literary tradition.

One example of this deferment appears in a frontispiece engraving from an 1819 British edition (Figure 2) in which a bearded male figure pursues a
young woman in a garden. Other than as a stock neoclassical allegory for seduction, perhaps intended to suggest the rape of Philomela, “the archetype of all ravished maidens,” by Tereus, or one of Zeus’s many assaults on mortal maidens, this image has nothing to do with the content of the novel, and the edition includes no other illustrations. As incongruous as this image seems, it ultimately reads as deliberately coy. By situating the text within a classicized tradition, the frontispiece draws the reader away from, rather than toward, the topicality of the text in which a bourgeois English maiden is seduced by an aristocratic English officer only to be abandoned to her death. This queasiness with what could be read as an anti-English subtext of the novel may not be surprising considering that this image appears in one of the earliest English reprintings of the novel after its 1791 debut.

And there certainly seems to be, at the very least, an anti-European thread in the novel. The seducer Montraville and his collaborators all have semiallegorical French names: La Rue, Du Pont—The Street, The Bridge—and of course une femme de la rue had the same implications in the 1790s that it does now. However, this classicized visual representation also bespeaks a pre-Victorian unease with the portrayal of sexuality in its contemporary context; it is one thing to portray Zeus mauling a nymph, but another matter entirely to visually portray the flowers of English youth participating in similar activities.

Other illustrations augment the affective force of the novel by drawing the reader’s attention to specific moments in the text and inviting repeated engagement, not only with the text but also with the illustrations themselves, by emphasizing the physical experience of reading and looking. Rowson’s conspicuous didactic narrator repeatedly invokes the reader in terms of her physical interaction with the book—turning over the pages, putting down the book in astonishment, and so forth—and Charlotte’s emotional reactions always manifest physically, as when “a death-like paleness overspread [her] countenance,” when she learns of Montraville’s abandonment. The images engage the physical more subtly, but with no less potency. For example, in an illustration from an 1842 New York edition, Charlotte is shown lost in “melancholy reflexions” in her garden (Figure 3). At first glance the image appears static, but the positioning of her hands suggests arrested action, one hand hovering over her heart, the other draped protectively over her abdomen where, at the point in the story where this illustration appears, her illicitly begotten child has begun to stir. Her surroundings here, with the anatomically shaped architectural elements and the willow tree—common symbols of grief in sentimental imagery—dominating the background, make this image a powerful moment of visual storytelling in which female sexual-
Figure 3. Charlotte in her garden with willow tree and urns. (New York: R. Hobbs, 1842). Courtesy of Fales Library & Special Collections, New York University.

ity, grief, and death are inextricably intertwined. The urn recalls the figures from the silver plaque on Clarissa’s coffin in Richardson’s novel, connecting Charlotte Temple’s heroine to a genealogy of the doomed young women in English sentimental fiction. The 1768 sixth edition of Clarissa includes a cut of the coffin as a frontispiece to volume VII, and a 1798 American abridgement belonging to Thomas Stebs included on its final page a cut of a coffin bearing the word FINIS along with a willow and urn motif.
These ornaments are typically associated with the Blessed Virgin in religious iconography. Here the urns suggest both the fecund female body and funerary vessels, as well as evoking the sense of containment and isolation Charlotte experiences in her confinement. The title page illustration of an 1827 yellow-back New York edition also depicts a pensive Charlotte in her garden with a willow tree in the background.  

It must be noted that neither the willow tree nor the urn is mentioned as ornaments of Charlotte’s garden by Rowson, and they appear in these illustrations strictly at the whim of the unknown engravers, who were clearly in touch with the iconography their readers would have expected from such a scene.

Another compelling moment reproduced in tableaux is Charlotte’s death scene. In a tableau from an 1831 London edition (Figure 4), the dying Charlotte delivers her newborn daughter into the hands of her father, illustrating the moment of her death:

“Protect her,” said she, “and bless your dying—”
Unable to finish the sentence, she sank back on her pillow: her countenance was serenely composed; she regarded her father as he pressed the infant to his breast with a steadfast look; a sudden beam of joy passed across her languid features, she raised her eyes to heaven—then closed them forever.

The death of the victim of seduction, along with the innocent vacancy of a dead child, the body of a mother wracked by grief, and the body of the whipped slave in abolitionist discourse, were central tropes of the violent hagiography of American sentiment. In this scene, the economy of virtue is maintained as the fallen daughter is exchanged for the innocent infant. In the light of that “sudden beam of joy,” which strangely places the manifestation of Charlotte’s emotion outside of her physical self—it passes across her features—our heroine is translated into what Douglas describes as “a kind of seduced saint.”

These tableaux illustrate iconic moments of intense feeling within the text, but the portraits were the real objects of devotion for the cult of Charlotte. Portraits of “the real Charlotte Temple” generally appear as frontispieces. One might suspect that the portraits were actually that of the author, standing in for her character, but here that is distinctly not the case, as was made clear by the inclusion of portraits of Mrs. Rowson along with the portraits of her heroine in some editions. To reinforce this sense of authenticity, some engravers were careful to maintain consistency between the portrait and the tableaux illustrations within the same edition, like the 1831 London
Figure 4. “Protect her,—and bless your dying—” Tableau illustration of the dying Charlotte passing the infant Lucy to her father. (London: H. Fisher, Son, & P. Jackson, 1831). Courtesy of Fales Library & Special Collections, New York University.
edition in which the engraver has clearly taken pains to represent the same woman both in frontispiece portrait and the deathbed tableau. Cornelius Tiebout’s stipple engraving from Carey’s 1809 edition is the earliest portrait I have identified. This simple, elegant portrait was reproduced in later editions, though never with the same quality as Tiebout’s original, and usually signed by the copying engraver. Several portraits and other illustrations are featured in multiple editions of *Charlotte Temple* across the nineteenth century, a practice that served to reinforce the iconic nature of the images. Further, repeating the same image—particularly the portraits—across several editions contributed to a sense of the authenticity of the image, providing for generations of readers an imagined connection to the “real” Charlotte Temple.

According to Walter Benjamin, the reproducibility of an original work of art caused the “decay of the aura” of the artwork because “the unique value of the ‘authentic’ work of art always has its basis in ritual.” Elsewhere Benjamin declared, “the very principle of . . . illustrations testifies to the close connection between reader and story,” and suggested that readers cut illustrations from books to paste on the walls of their rooms, increasing the iconic quality of the illustration by ritualizing the readers’ interaction with the image. The anxiety about the reproducible image for Benjamin is that this ritualization becomes both fetishism and idolatry, one a function of the commodity system, the other a reactionary, recidivist atavism. The *Charlotte Temple* portraits seem to prefigure the “melancholy, incomparable beauty” of early portrait photography that so captivated Benjamin. In J. Hillis Miller’s account:

> The melancholy beauty of early portrait photographs is not to be compared to anything else, because such photographs express a double loss. On the one hand they are the product of prosopopoeia, traditionally defined as the ascription of a name, a face or a voice to the absent, the inanimate or the dead. . . . On the other hand, portrait photographs [for Benjamin] . . . have an “incomparable” melancholy because they mark the historical moment when cult value was disappearing for good.

This would be particularly true in those late dime-novel covers that included photographic portraits. However, in the absence of either an authentic original—in the case of the engraved portraits neither an original sitter nor an original “fine art” work exists—what we see in the reproduction of these portraits is the use of an image to represent an absence, akin to Baudrillard’s simulacrum. In this case, the portraits purport to represent a fiction-
al character that accrues, through its reproduction and circulation over time among a community of readers, an imaginary value that seems to overwrite and exceed its original use value.

The image’s inauthenticity becomes effaced by an aura of “the real,” which accrues to it through reproduction. In this process, we see the extension of traditional religious iconography, in which a singular image—the eikon—stands in for an object through either concrete representation or analogy, toward the modern notion of the icon in which a widely circulated and readily recognizable image becomes the embodiment of certain greater social, cultural, or political—and not necessarily religious—ideals or values.36

In antebellum America, representations of George Washington in particular became iconic in this modern sense, as images of Washington produced and circulated after his death were fully incorporated into the national culture of grief and, as Max Cavitch describes it, “the cults of George Washington and Charlotte Temple vied for national attention.”37 These images became iconic not because of their singularity, but because of their familiarity as a result of reproduction and widespread circulation. In the case of the Tiebout engraving, its likely original intent was to increase the appeal and market value of the novel to which it was appended. In its reproduction, a sense of realness attaches to the image, reinforcing the truth claim of the novel’s title and contributing to the readers’ sense of participation in a devotional network for which the portraits and, as we shall see, the gravesite in Trinity Churchyard become foci. Multiple portraits appear and are reproduced, none of which much resemble each other—a fact that should further destabilize the notion of an original Charlotte on whom these representations are based—but readers never seem to respond to this as an inconsistency, recognizing perhaps that what is important in these portraits and their reproducibility is that ultimately what is being reproduced is not in fact Charlotte Temple, but rather an iconic representation of the text’s ideal reader.

Readers responded to this figuration by interacting in careful, intimate ways with the portraits, poignantly exemplified by the carefully colored-in blue ribbon a reader added to Charlotte’s dress in engraver Abel Bowen’s 1824 reproduction of the original Tiebout portrait.38 The blue pencil used to color in the ribbon matches other readers’ marks in the copy. Another, more elaborate example of a reader coloring the portrait occurs in a copy of the 1809 Carey edition, in which a reader has colored in the whole portrait, adding a flower to the hair ribbon and a nosegay to Charlotte’s décolletage.39 Motivated by the same impulse that compelled Mary Ann Wodrow
Archbald to “give a little culour to the interesting face of Mary Woolstonecraft [sic]” in her copy of the posthumous collected works, the attention and care given to these examples distinguish them from those images that were colored by printers or booksellers.

I read this attentive hand-coloring by readers as a devotional practice—a simple and sweet offering from a sincere votary before an image that is simultaneously an icon of their patroness and a mirror in which they may see their own vulnerability reflected. And while not all repetitive and absorptive behavior is devotional—there is certainly an element of play to some coloring-in by readers—this practice of intimate interaction and repeated looking, as well as the display of illustrations torn from books that Benjamin identifies as ritualistic, seems in the case of the portraits to take on aspects of icon worship in its traditional sense. Regardless, as art historian T. J. Clark reminds us, “astonishing things happen if one gives oneself over to the process of seeing again and again,” and these readers revisited both text and image over and over, increasing with familiarity the frisson of recognition that compelled them to identify with their fallen heroine.

The transactions between reader, illustration, and text created an intimacy between consumer and product that relied heavily on the sentimental identification between reader and character for its effectiveness. Female readers were supposed to pity sweet, swooning Charlotte, and emulate the character of Mrs. Beauchamp, whose defiance of social prohibitions in befriending the fallen Charlotte was clearly Rowson’s intended exemplar for her female readers, but who interestingly never appears in illustrations. The question of identification is more complicated when we consider male readers. Are they intended to fix their affective identification on the ineffectual, feminized father—who must be redeemed by the narrative—or are they to identify with the rake, the villain of the piece who must be humbled? The illustrations of these male characters offer both, at various stages of their development.

Perhaps the most obvious point of identification for the male reader, but most risky from a didactic point of view, is Montraville, the rake. Male figures get roughly equal time with the female figures in the tableaux illustrations, and likewise agency is distributed between the male and female figures. In the tableaux depicting Montraville and Charlotte’s fateful garden walk, some illustrations place the female figure in the lead and thus implicate her in her downfall; others reverse the positions of the actors, putting the man in the lead, as in an 1842 frontispiece in which Montraville’s military costume is exaggerated almost to the point of caricature, and he is shown leading a demure Charlotte deeper into the woods.
Other illustrations, while remaining firmly grounded in the visual vocabulary of the sentimental, push the limits between augmenting the affective force of the novel and being merely titillating. These illustrations portray Charlotte in moments of physical duress, as in Figure 5, a tableau of Charlotte begging Montraville not to abandon her while Belcourt looks on. For Karen Sánchez-Eppler in *Touching Liberty*, “sentimental fiction constitutes an intensely bodily genre,” and Samuel Otter describes the sentimental as “a scene of reading in which tears, ink and blood mix,” gesturing toward both the corporeality of the characters in the novel and the physical responses produced in readers through their affective experience of the fiction. The book on the table at the center right of the illustration indicates that this tumult is taking place in “a scene of reading,” though the erotic subtext unsettles the familiar dynamic of feeling between reader, illustration, and text. This staging of the heroine’s rejection reads simultaneously as a scene of her sexual subjection to Montraville. He holds the hilt of his sword near her upturned mouth, suggesting fellatio, while in the background Belcourt gestures toward the book on the table as though guiding the reader into the text. The illustration appears as a frontispiece, and the page reference for the scene portrayed is provided, so the eager reader can easily follow Belcourt’s guiding hand and jump ahead. This page marking also serves to encourage alveary reading of the sort described by Matthew Brown in *The Pilgrim and the Bee* in relation to devotional texts. Alveary reading is the bee in Brown’s equation, in which readers, like bees, sample here and there from texts. In this case, the frontispiece functions indexically, guiding the reader to a strategic location within the text. The page number directs the reader to the moment of crisis that precipitates the devolving action toward the heroine’s demise, directing the readerly gaze to the situation most likely to produce sentiment and compelling the reader to follow the heroine’s flight toward the story’s didactic dénouement.

And every reader knew where that flight would end—with the death of their heroine—but interestingly it is the rake’s progress that provides the model for devotion that many readers would imitate. The novel ends with a stricken and repentant Montraville, “subject to severe fits of melancholy,” weeping in the cemetery for “the untimely fate of the lovely Charlotte Temple.” In the graveyard of Trinity Church in New York City, there is a gravestone on which *Charlotte Temple* was engraved after the original plaque was lost or removed, which was the destination for thousands of pilgrims in the nineteenth century. This practice was not unusual in the period; the grave of Elizabeth Whitman, the inspiration for Hannah Foster’s *The Coquette* and an episode in William Hill Brown’s *The Power of Sympathy*,
Figure 5. *Montraville, Belcour, and Charlotte*. Tableau illustration of Charlotte’s rejection by Montraville. This illustration was copied in several editions. *Love and Romance: Charlotte and Lucy Temple* (Philadelphia: J. R. Lippincott & Co., 1864). Private collection. Used by permission.
was also the scene of sentimental pilgrimage. According to Bryan Waterman, “whether visitors aimed to memorialize Whitman, to emulate her, or to use her story as a cautionary tale, they often carried away a piece of the headstone," and her gravestone was gradually frittered away by visitors wanting to take with them some relic of their seduced saint. By the mid-nineteenth century, perhaps partially in response to the sentimental impulse to visit cemeteries on just this sort of pilgrimage, public cemeteries were designed with the leisure visitor in mind. Boston’s Mount Auburn Cemetery and Brooklyn’s Greenwood Cemetery were designed as places of reflection where visitors could “indulge in the dreams of hope and ambition, or solace their hearts by melancholy reflection.” In Greenwood Cemetery, the monuments for Charlotte Canda, who died in a carriage accident in 1845 at the age of seventeen, and her fiancé, Charles Albert Jarrett de la Marie, who was driven to suicide by grief, also became popular destinations. Unlike these monuments to known individuals, Charlotte Temple’s gravestone is a palimpsest, overwriting both the grave and the grief for the original inhabitant of that plot in Trinity Churchyard, which Trinity Church records show to be a family vault in which more than one person would be interred, not an individual grave at all. Like the lost original inhabitant(s) of the gravesite, the meaning of the lives of those historic individuals identified by Rowson as her prototypes—Charlotte Stanley and John Montresor—became superinscribed as readers performatively wrote their grief, anxiety, and guilt—real, imagined, affective—onto the story of Charlotte and Montraville.

Booksellers and printers simultaneously capitalized on and encouraged this mythology by including illustrations of the gravesite in editions of Charlotte Temple. The first edition I find with such an illustration is relatively late, an 1840 edition from N. C. Nafis in New York. The edition is a copy of a cheap, yellow-paper 1832 edition from W. Murray in London, but adds the cut of Montraville visiting Charlotte’s grave to the back cover (which in the Murray editions had a stock library motif engraving) (Figure 6). The grave in the illustration, however, has an upright stone that does not in the least resemble the vault cover in Trinity’s Churchyard. This may be because the Trinity grave did not bear the inscription “Charlotte Temple” in 1840. Halsey reports that “William H. Commelin, the foreman in charge of stone-cutting” for the 1840s renovations of Trinity Church, “caused the name ‘Charlotte Temple’ to be cut into the stone in the manner in which it remains to this day” in 1846 after the original plaque went missing from the stone during construction (the damage to the stone from the removal of the plaque is still visible).
In 1873, Wood’s Illustrated Hand-Book to New York and Environs told visitors that “many interesting tombstones and relics of former ages will be found in the old graveyards surrounding Trinity Church and St. Paul’s, a few of which our artist has sketched in these pages,” and included a cut of Charlotte’s grave in Trinity Churchyard along with cuts of the tombs of Captain Lawrence, Albert Gallatin, and Alexander Hamilton, giving Charlotte equal prominence for visitors as these heroes and statesmen of the Revolution and new republic. A King’s Handbook of New York City from 1893 also mentions the grave, but in terms that distance the grave and its occupant from the novel: “Among other interesting things in Trinity churchyard . . . [is] the slab that covers the remains of Charlotte Temple, whose name, by a peculiar coincidence, was erroneously associated with a fictitious sad story in one of the romances of New York’s early life.”

During the Centennial, postcards were printed of Charlotte’s grave with a Centennial flag hanging nearby, creating a connection in the collective memory between the story of Charlotte and the origins of the nation (Figure 7). By the late nineteenth century, some New York City visitor’s guides even provided the imagined location of Charlotte’s house. A collector (possibly the Lillian Wright who inscribed the flyleaf) pasted this typewritten note into a 1794 edition: “I was
shown the locality of an incident which has had more readers than any other popular tale of modern times. No. 24 on Bowery Road, is a low wooden house, the same from which the heroine of ‘Charlotte Temple’ was seduced by a British officer. The facts were stated to me and the place shown by Dr. F. Watson’s ‘Annals of New York,’ page 225.” By emphasizing these destinations for sentimental and even patriotic tourism, readers were encouraged to follow, not in Charlotte’s but Montraville’s footsteps, to visit the scene of her downfall and then her grave; to grieve for her and sympathetically repent, as Montraville does at the end of the novel. Thus, in a direct contradiction to the rake’s progress of the eighteenth century, which ended in either a duel or the gallows, Montraville’s progress becomes idealized as a type of sentimental pilgrimage, and it is this particular masculinity that produces the man of feeling, rather than being wholly a refutation of the values the man of feeling represents.56

The active, peripatetic path of the rake stands in stark contrast to the role taken by the father in the seduction story. The father is a static, stationary figure; if he moves at all, it is backward—into poverty, feebleness, and infantilization. In the course of the narrative he must, through the sacrifice of
his daughter (often of her life as well as her virtue), or through the action of a younger man of feeling, be redeemed into a more active, patriarchal role. *Charlotte Temple* offers two examples of the feminine father: Mr. Temple, her father, and Mr. Eldridge, her maternal grandfather. At the beginning of the novel, the reader is presented with Mr. Eldridge’s story, which offers curious parallels with Charlotte’s own story and suggests that men, as well as women, may be the victims of seducers. In the 1831 London edition, the long flashback is illustrated with a representation of the story’s end, with Mr. Eldridge awakening to learn that both his wife and son are dead, with his daughter Lucy swooning and stricken speechless by the horrors of the night (Figure 8). His son has been slain in a duel with Mr. Lewis, a young gentleman who had insinuated himself into the Eldridge family, acting as mentor and sponsor to young George, and who had “made professions of love” to Lucy, Eldridge’s “unaffectedly artless” daughter. Upon learning that Lewis’s intentions toward Lucy are “equivocal,” Eldridge forbids him the house. In retaliation, Lewis calls in his debt, which Eldridge is unable to pay. In one night, “the horrors” of which, says Eldridge, “unman me,” Lewis has him imprisoned for debt; young George then confronts Lewis, is challenged to a duel, and is mortally wounded. Mrs. Eldridge falls into a swoon and expires when she sees the bleeding body of her son. In the course of his downfall, Eldridge himself was a victim of seduction—his admission of financial need to support his son’s military career allowed him to be victimized by the younger Mr. Lewis, effectively emasculating him and opening him to a type of fiscal rape that also leaves Lucy vulnerable to Lewis’s sexual depredations. Mr. Temple rescues Mr. Eldridge from penury and marries his daughter, Lucy, though at great cost to himself. Through his sentimental intervention, Temple is able to redeem Eldridge—the male victim of seduction—and act as protector to Lucy, the other potential victim of Lewis’s plot, and thus claim his own position as virtuous patriarch. But Mr. Temple is less successful at protecting his own daughter, having by that time slipped into the same kind of moral dotage that allowed Eldridge himself to fail. It is Charlotte’s fall, and his belated intervention into her tragic situation, that restores Mr. Temple to patriarchy.

The tableau in which the dying Charlotte delivers her newborn daughter into the hands of her father (Figure 4) suggests that the restored body of the man of feeling, reclaiming his patriarchal role in the wake of his daughter’s sacrifice, was also a necessary component of the sentimental hagiographic equation and provided the male reader a positive and less morally risky point of identification than the repentant rake. In this scene, the feminized, ineffectual father is redeemed by the sacrifice of his daughter, and given a
Figure 8. “What! both gone,” said I—Tableau illustration of Mr. Eldridge learning of the deaths of his wife and son. (London: H. Fisher, Son, & P. Jackson, 1831). Courtesy of Fales Library & Special Collections, New York University.
second chance to succeed as a father by raising Charlotte’s child. Charlotte’s final submission—relinquishing her child to her now active and protective father—is part of her translation into sentimental sainthood.

In closing, I suggest that the portraits, too, offer entrée for the male reader. By appealing to their reaction to the portraits as brothers, as fathers and, yes, as lovers, the portraits teach the male reader to, in Stowe’s terms, “feel right” about the victim of seduction, but also women in general. While male readers may have been less likely than their female counterparts to participate in the devotional hand-coloring of the illustrations, the physicality of the identification with an idealized and somehow familiar face on the page may well have been equally compelling for the male reader. Of course there are risks to this identification for the male reader as well. For the female reader, identification with the portraits could constitute a loss of identity in which her subjectivity dissolves in Charlotte’s tragedy; but for the male reader this collapse leads to a failure of sentimental identification, which results in an extreme of feeling based on desire. This dynamic unsettles any positive, sentimental reading of the identification between reader and text, and undermines the didactic potential of the novel. The more sensational editions of the novel, perhaps marketed as part of the rake culture that arose in midcentury, which encouraged young men to celebrate their sexual conquests rather than agonizing over the cost of seduction, represent Charlotte as an object of desire, and play up her coquettishness at the beginning of the novel. An 1865 Philadelphia edition, which, despite significant abridgement claims to be “The Only Correct and Authentic Edition,” includes a full-length portrait captioned “Likeness of Charlotte Temple (Taken from an Original Portrait),” though the young woman in the image is dressed in the fashions of the 1860s, as well as illustrations of Montraville threatening suicide when Charlotte rejects him, and of the fallen rake offering his sword to Mr. Temple at Charlotte’s burial. The rake’s role is dramatized in these illustrations, and Charlotte is the coquette whose fall seems merely supplemental to the transformation of the rake. The dime-novel edition that included the photographic portraits on their covers further contemporized the story and supplemented the pinup quality of the later Charlotte.

Where the male reader was concerned, the publisher’s intent seems to have been more sensationalistic than didactic or even sentimental, though this gendered split between sensation and sentiment may have been transparent to nineteenth-century readers in whom Charlotte Temple inspired such devotion and pleasure; as historian Rodney Hessinger points out, “sensibility had the potential to be a gender-neutral model of sensitivity.” Illustrations drew both male and female readers into the text, enabling printers
who published, repackaged, and distributed *Charlotte Temple* to capitalize on this eighteenth-century English novel even in the rapidly expanding print marketplace of nineteenth-century America. The cult of sentiment that grew up around *Charlotte Temple* drew some of its power from the near-religious identification between reader and character, a character whose face they knew from those carefully hand-colored portraits, whose hallowed grave they could visit, and who spoke to them so clearly in the language of feeling.

**Notes**


3. R. W. G. Vail, *Susanna Haswell Rowson, the Author of Charlotte Temple*, a Bibliographical Study (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1933). While the novel was eventually printed in many states, including Vermont, Ohio, and Virginia, its print production remained concentrated in Philadelphia and later in New York as well.


“British Seduced Maidens.” While Staves contextualizes *Charlotte Temple* in the tradition of the eighteenth-century seduction novel, Forcey argues that the failure of the epistolary mode in *Charlotte Temple* marks a shift in the novel form. Stern is concerned with the novel in the context of the national culture of mourning. In the most thorough examination of Rowson’s legacy to date, Rust places Rowson’s novels, including *Charlotte Temple*, in the context of her pedagogical writing, and traces her gradual assimilation as an American author and educator. This list is by no means exhaustive.


10. Carey placed thirty-one advertisements in his own *Gazette of the United States* between April 29 and July 23, 1794, and continued to advertise the novel in his own and rival newspapers throughout New England. By 1798, single-edition advertisements largely disappear, and *Charlotte Temple* began to appear mainly on bookseller’s lists and in published records for subscription libraries.


14. See, for example: Library Company of Philadelphia copy of (Boston: Printed & Published by Samuel Avery, No. 91 Newbury Street, 1811), 158. And (Philadelphia: Henry Altemus Company, [1900]). Private collection.


20. In Rust’s account, “The idea that thought and imagination require a ‘place’ appears across the classical and medieval periods: Cicero remarks that abstractions ‘require an abode’
because ‘the embodied cannot be known without a place [corpus intelligi sine loco non potest].’


22. PCT, vii–viii.

23. Ibid., 103.


27. PCT, 127.

28. PCT, xxxi.


31. Walter Benjamin, “Chambermaids’ Romances of the Past Century,” in Jennings, Doherty, and Levin, *Work of Art*, 240–48. Readers of *Charlotte Temple* may have interacted similarly with the portraits, a notion attested to by the variations in editions in different collections. For example, the Fales Library’s 1809 Carey edition does not include the stipple portrait. It may also be the case that some illustrations were either removed or added as plates when the books were bound. The Rowson portrait in the Fales 1831 Fisher and Son edition is a separate plate printed on different paper stock than the rest of the volume and bound into the book. The author portrait is absent in the AAS copy.

32. For an examination of Benjamin’s concern with the aura of a work of art, particularly in relation to photography, which Benjamin defended as a revolutionary art form, see W. J. T. Mitchell, *Iconology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 180–85.


38. Fales copy of (Boston: Charles Ewer, 1824).

39. Cathy Davidson includes this portrait from the AAS copy of (Philadelphia: Mathew Carey, 1809) as Figure 12 of Revolution and the Word, describing it as a “stipple engraving of a sweet, innocent-looking Charlotte” that “has been carefully hand-colored by an anonymous reader.” Davidson, Revolution and the Word, 218.


41. A typical example of professionally colored illustration is the AAS copy of Eliza Lee Cabot Follen’s Made-Up Stories (Boston: Nichols & Hall, 1868). These illustrations would have been colored assembly-line style, with different artists using different colors. The limited palette (red, brown, blue, green, and yellow) is uniform throughout. Of the copies of Charlotte Temple in the collections I have examined (Library Company of Philadelphia, American Antiquarian Society, and the Fales Library), only two include professional coloring. One is the portrait on the cover of No. 7 of Munro’s Ten Cent Novels in which Charlotte’s dress and plumed hat are given slapdash splashes of red, white, and blue color, giving a patriotic sprucing up to an otherwise cheap and undistinguished chapbook. The other is the 1830 Charlotte Temple from Fisher and Brother mentioned above, which includes a color cover, but the internal illustration is not colored. The hand-colored Tiebout and Bowen portraits in the AAS and Fales, respectively, are the only examples of reader coloring I have found in editions of Charlotte Temple, though I have found numerous examples of other illustrations in books and periodicals ranging from Pilgrim’s Progress to The Slave’s Friend to which readers have added color to their favorite illustrations.


43. (New York: R. Hobbs, 1842), Frontispiece. Fales Library & Special Collections.

44. This image appeared in several editions, including (Hartford, Conn.: Silus Andrus, 1827), Frontispiece; also an 1833 edition from Andrus, as well as the 1864 edition titled Love & Romance: Charlotte and Lucy Temple from Lippincott in Figure 5.


47. PCT, 130.


52. Halsey, introduction to *Charlotte Temple*, lx.

53. *Wood’s Illustrated Hand-Book to New York and Environs.* Illustrations drawn & engraved by Fay & Cox (New York: G. W. Carleton, London: S. Low, Son, 1873), 160–61. Of the two dozen or so New York guidebooks I reviewed at the Library Company of Philadelphia and the Fales Library, ranging in date from 1817 to 1873, only *Wood’s* and *King’s* include Charlotte’s grave, though all describe Trinity Church as a destination for tourists.

54. *King’s Handbook of New York City* (Boston: Moses King, 1893), 509. Fales Library & Special Collections.


56. In a rather disappointing postscript to a mystery that persisted for a century and a half, Trinity Church archivist Gwynedd Cannan delivered the final blow to the myth of Charlotte’s grave in December 2008 by removing the slab to determine if there was a vault underneath. “Packed dirt greeted her instead. And for fear of disturbing any human remains that might be within it—the graveyard was a Dutch burying ground in the 1600s, before the larger burial vaults were in common use—they put the slab back in place.” Cannan speculated that the stonemason did not merely rename an existing slab but actually used leftover stone from the church renovations to fashion the memorial. C. J. Hughes. “Buried in the Churchyard: A Good Story, at Least,” *New York Times*, December 13, 2008.

57. PCT, 10–11.


Illustrated Editions of
Charlotte Temple, 1808–1905

Abbreviations

AAS American Antiquarian Society
EAI2 Early American Imprints Series 2 (Shaw-Shoemaker)
FNY Fales Library & Special Collections, New York University
LCP Library Company of Philadelphia
Vail R. W. G. Vail, Susanna Haswell Rowson, the Author of Charlotte Temple, a Bibliographical Study (Worcester, Mass.: American Antiquarian Society, 1933).

Catalog numbers are provided where available.


15. Mrs. Rowson, *Charlotte Temple. A tale of truth*. New York: Published by R. Hobbs, 1827 [Stereotyped 1829, T. Seward for George Sickels], [AAS, LCP Am 1827 Rowson 103424,D (Weingarten), Vail 52 (variant)] Same frontispiece and engraved title page as Vail 52.


page as Vail 52. Vail notes: “Title page woodcut showing Montraville and Julia Franklin entering a church” in New York Historical Society copy.


37. Mrs. Rowson, Charlotte Temple. A tale of truth. New York: Published by N. C. Nafis, No. 98 Catherine Street, 1840. [AAS G526 R885 C840, LCP Am 1840 Row 59986.D, Vail 77] Frontispiece engraving Charlottes Grave. Same title page and cover vignette as Vail 62. The woodland vignette on the title page was available as a stock image in American printers’ specimen books as early as 1836, but the format of cover and title match the London, Murray edition of 1832, so the engraving block may have been copied from English plates. See Robb & Ecklin, Specimen of Printing Types (Philadelphia: Robb & Ecklin, 1836.)


Pictures of Charlotte


59. Mrs. Rowson, Charlotte Temple; a tale of truth. New York: George Munro & Co. Publishers, 137 William Street, [1867–68]. No. 7 Munro's Ten Cent Novels. [AAS G526 R885 Cndmten, Vail 105] AAS copy has cover portrait of Charlotte—hand-colored (by publisher) in red, white, and blue dress and plumed hat. Portrait repeats on covering page with caption: “’Twas strange, ’twas passing strange! / ’Twas pitiful, ’twas wondrous pitiful.” [Othello Act 1, scene 3, 158–63]


