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MIDDLE-CLASS IDENTITY AND CORPOREAL ATTACHMENTS IN *THE WIDE, WIDE
WORLD*

A Thesis By

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Bachelor of Arts, Wichita State University, 2013

Submitted to the Department of English
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WORLD*

The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of English.

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ABSTRACT

Early nineteenth century industrialization and capitalism stimulated growth in public labor forces and consumer markets. Though largely conceived as a male-centered history, industrialization upended the lives of women; who, acting as producers and consumers, established themselves as integral components of the capitalist system. In response to this social metamorphosis, white middle-class ideologies – such as the cult of true womanhood, sentimentalism, and the cult of domesticity – emerged to preserve feminine sensibilities and purity from the cruelties and corruption of the consumer market. In her wildly popular sentimental novel *The Wide, Wide World*, published in 1850, Susan Warner disseminates domestic, sentimental ideologies and explores the perversity of the capitalist world. Warner’s young orphaned protagonist, Ellen Montgomery, exposes the particulars of female consumption and white, middle-class, female labor. Warner ultimately places Ellen on the margins of the economic world as an invisible domestic laborer with imperfect male-regulated access to consumer markets. Men dominate both the domestic and economic spheres, and the definition white middle-class manhood emerges in tandem with the definition of “true womanhood.” Warner actualizes the subversive potential of the novel by exposing the economic subjection and the domestic regulation of women by the male-hegemonic systems that define and commodify womanhood.

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INTRODUCTION:

By the summer of 1849 Susan Warner had completed the manuscript of her first novel, *The Wide, Wide World*. The story follows Ellen Montgomery, a young orphan, as she reconciles the loss of her mother through numerous tears and an unyielding Christian conviction for submission to God and men, which ultimately ends in her marriage.¹ Under the pseudonym Elizabeth Wetherell, Warner released her “little big book” upon an already saturated but growing publishing market where it was eventually picked up by publisher George Palmer Putnam under the urging of his mother who, so impressed with the moral faculties of the narrative, exclaimed, “if you never publish another book, publish this” (Anna Bartlet Warner 282-283). The reading public shared Mrs. Putnam’s regard for the novel and, following its publication in December 1850, *The Wide, Wide World* became “the first American best-seller” (Elbert 19). Warner’s novel subsequently influenced later domestic authors – chiefly Susana Maria Cummins whose most famous novel, *The Lamplighter*, mirrored *The Wide, Wide World* – leading one reviewer from *The Literary World* to pronounce the novel an “excellent example of the now common class of religious novels” (“Review of *The Wide, Wide World*.”).²

Warner’s success and the popularity of sentimental literature met with opposition from other notable, established authors. Elaine Showalter explains, “*The Wide, Wide World* was the most celebrated domestic novel of the 1850s, going through thirteen editions in two years, selling over a million copies and probably causing much grinding of teeth among male novelists” (98).

¹ Ellen marries her former tutor whom she affectionately calls “brother.” Their future union, however, is only alluded to in the early editions of the novel, but in an unpublished chapter Warner confirms their marriage and depicts Ellen and John in their new home as a married couple.

² Nina Baym contends that *The Lamplighter*, published in 1854, is the “most successful imitation” of *The Wide, Wide World*, but each contains their subtle differences in plot and style – *The Lamplighter* is “more melodramatic” than its counterpart, according to Baym, yet mercifully shorter (164). Warner inspired a host of hopeful authors throughout the 1850’s, Cummins being one of the more successful. Jane Tompkins, too, remarks on the relationship between these two texts calling *The Lamplighter* a “direct literary descendent of *The Wide, Wide World*” (148).

Her assumption assuredly refers to Nathaniel Hawthorne's recorded diatribe against female novelists of the decade. In a letter to his publisher, Hawthorne wrote his most famously quoted remark: "Besides, America is now wholly given over to a d – d mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash" (75). Hawthorne's censure highlights contemporary distinctions between lowbrow and highbrow literature, or "the popular and the prestigious literature of this era" (Ball 43). Sentimental literature was considered low-brow by the more prestigious but less commercially successful writers of the American Renaissance, such as Hawthorne, who "objected to the reduction of literature to the status of a commodity" (Gilmore 6).

The novel and sentimental fiction additionally met with opposition from religious and secular groups who advocated anti-novel rhetoric, a discourse which Warner engages in the *The Wide, Wide World*. Many individuals opposed novel reading at this time; religious groups believed that novels exposed people, particularly women, to overwrought emotional stimuli and secular groups worried about the novel's "inherent potential to figure in a public space" (Brady 721). Jennifer Brady asserts, "opponents of the novel believed that both readers and the public they constituted had arrived at a historical tipping point, one at which novels might either atomize or organize a public through the affective power they exerted over discrete readers" (728). Reading sentimental fiction then serves as a political act (or at least a highly socialized one), which conflicted with temperance discourses and furthered capitalist goals by opening another consumer market.

In "Preserving Sentiments," Anna Gilding explores women's print culture in magazines of the period where editors created "networks" of attachment and "preserve[d] personal bonds" in their publications (157, 166). Gilding's research underscores what anti-novel advocates feared:

Sentimental fiction unified readers through emotive force and undermined the social push for individuals, specifically women, to read for intellectual and moral development only. The consumer market proffered by women's print culture directly relates to what Lauren Berlant identifies as an "intimate public" which "operates when a market opens up to a bloc of consumers, claiming to circulate texts and things that express those people's particular core interests and desires" (5). Women's culture and the intimate public transform sentimentality from a specifically personal, intimate exchange to one that figures into a public, consumer marketplace. Also foremost among the suspicions surrounding novel reading was the concern that novels not only unified a reading public but also "violated the codes of domestic privacy by exposing the cruelties of home life to the eyes of the reader" (Shamir 124); sentimental novels, therefore, further dissolved the veil between private and public.

Modern readers approach the concept of sentimentality primarily through nineteenth century novels written by the white women, but the sentimental readership of that time engaged with other forms of sentimental literature as well. Popular women's magazines like *Godey's Lady's Book* commercialized fiction and women's style. The relationship between sentimental novels and other popular publications read by women of the time coincide in the way they project sentimentality and also the way in which they illustrate domesticity. Traditionally, sentimental literature examines the separate spheres – either as empowering or disempowering³ - and scholars of sentimental literature examine domestic interiority as evidence of a nascent

³ Ann Douglass in *The Feminization of American Culture* and Jane Tompkins in *Sensational Designs* each provide contrasting ideas on the ramifications of the separate spheres; their discourse is popularly referred to as the "Douglass-Tompkins debate." Douglass views sentimentality as a great failure leading to both the "loss of the finest values contained in Calvinism" and the "continuation of male hegemony in different guises" (13); Tompkins, conversely, reconsiders the aesthetic value of sentimental texts, previously dismissed academically as popular fiction and consider their potential as vehicles for social and political change.

female culture.⁴ Putting pressure on the public-private dichotomy, June Howard writes, “sentimental works consistently engage us in the intricate impasse of public and private, proclaiming their separation and at the same time demonstrating their inseparability” (76-7). Without abandoning the framework entirely, recent scholars, however, put less pressure on the “rhetoric of the separate spheres” – which, Ball alleges, “has unduly segregated popular and prestigious literature of this era” – to demonstrate how sentimental culture’s preoccupation with these communities leads to a larger political and economic discourse (43). In *Sentimental Materialism*, Lori Merish examines the relationships between economics and gender and domesticity and market exchange in the burgeoning consumer culture in early nineteenth century America. She writes, “sentimental narratives engender feelings of power as well as submission endemic to liberal political culture; they thus instantiate a particular form of liberal political subjection, in which agency and subordination are intertwined” (3). Merish largely excludes *The Wide, Wide World* in her interrogation of female “political subjection” in sentimental narratives; however, her study provides a useful framework for examining Warner’s political and economic world. Ellen’s own agency, or rather failed agency, in public spaces does not expose the disempowering nature of the public sphere for the female participant but instead reveals a deeper reliance on the strictures of white middle-class, female conduct against the formidable American market system and industrialism.

Despite its contentious history, Warner’s novel is no less valuable in its construction and hermeneutic representation of existent social tensions. In this essay I explore the implications of the emerging market systems in relation to labor, commodities, and womanhood. Within the novel’s pages, Warner details the unconscious political and social dichotomies at play during the

⁴ In *The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism and Temperance in Nineteenth Century America* (1981), Barbara Epstein views men and women as “representatives of antagonistic cultures” (62).

time of her novel's publication. Her contemporary, nineteenth century critics reveal how deeply invested the public was in the conversation on political and economic disparity, which primarily involves emerging commercial industries. Through Ellen's own obedient, silent suffering, Warner critiques female engagement in labor systems and consumer exploits. In my first section, I explore Warner's contrasting scenes of urban domestic felicity and laborious country life to distinguish between differing versions of female labor: In the first, Ellen undertakes the pure and honorable task of serving her mother with the special business of making her tea, and in the second, she experiences the unremitting fatigue of running a country manor. Lower, country domesticity, while preventing Ellen from engaging in elevated forms of study and thought, highlights the subjection of the female individual who finds herself likewise objectified in each varied form of the domestic space: objectified in terms of delicate femininity and objectified as a laborer.

My second section then addresses Warner's use of commodities and labor to explore appropriate female access to public spaces and examines the role of public systems in the development of "true womanhood."⁵ Warner details female consumer practices and illustrates commodities, including dress and domestic necessities, as compulsory objects that constitute the self and the home; yet she undercuts female economic autonomy with the introduction of male managers and patriarchs who intervene in female market interaction. My final section addresses how men function in the private, domestic sphere. They become the lens for judging appropriate female conduct. Warner ultimately shows that white, middle-class womanhood emerges in response to male domestic management and heteronormative desire. At the close of the

⁵ Barbara Welter coined the phrases "The Cult of True Womanhood" and "The Cult of Domesticity" to describe the tenements of female education and domesticity – piety, purity, submission, and the roles of nurse, wife, and mother – as they were preserved in the publications of this time period, which served a predominantly female demographic. True womanhood is largely a middle-class ideology. [from "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860" (1966).]

unpublished chapter, the reader finds Ellen situated in a suffocative intermediary space between her husband's study and their marriage bed. The novel thus reveals the suffocating nature of domestic and sentimental ideology and its severance from capitalist and industrial markets in the nineteenth century.

CHAPTER I: LABOR AND CLASS IDENTITY

Novelists in the 1850s witnessed constant ebbs and flows between the predominance of pastoralism and an industrialized market economy. Industrialization in the United States led to increased urbanization and the growth of working-class wage earners (Dublin 14).⁶ Historians commonly focus on the most potent productions of American industrialism in the early nineteenth century including the railroad system, steel production, and agricultural mechanization. The historical focus on these specifically *industrial* creations according to Thomas Dublin, leaves one “with a strong sense that the industrial revolution is primarily a men’s story” (2); however, the early nineteenth century saw a massive transformation of women’s work as well. Increased urbanization “contributed to the skyrocketing growth of domestic services and unskilled laboring jobs” particularly suited for the female laborers (Dublin 1). Working-class women – especially young, unmarried women – left their homes to work in another’s.⁷

With the proliferation of female domestic service wage earners, the archetypal white, middle class housewife struggled to command her identity as a domestic laborer. Alan Kulikoff explains, “Capitalism, as a labor system, progressively separated home from work ... thereby devaluing the domestic work of married women but encouraging female market production on the farm, in the factory, and at the schoolhouse” (6-7). Women in the working class began to assume a professional identity that entails domestic labor, and they begin to take over the traditional work of middle class women. Warner’s preoccupation with labor exposes middle-

⁶ Thomas Dublin places the beginning of industrialization in New England around 1790 (14).

⁷ In his book, Dublin focuses on “five distinct groups of workingwomen in New England – textile, shoe, and garment workers, domestic servants, and teachers” (15). I am mostly interested in the domestic work that women performed; however, the alternate industries that women participated in – particularly textile and teaching work, jobs that were traditionally performed by women in the home as free laborers – evince a changing definition for domestic labor and a movement towards a more public-centered life.

class anxieties about labor and class association. She portrays Ellen Montgomery, her heroine, performing two distinct forms of domestic labor – work in the home, assigned to the middle class woman and work in the kitchen or on the farm, assigned to the working class woman. Ellen’s exposure to labor challenges the devaluation of “the domestic work of married women” that Kulikoff describes. Instead of extoling the potential for female professionalization, Warner devalues the incessant work associated with wage earners; and she alternately celebrates domestic labors performed in the parlor.

Warner begins her novel with a moment of delicate domesticity as little Ellen plays at the labor of organizing her interior space:

Do but see how those chairs are standing – one would think we had had a sewing circle here – there, go back to your places, – that looks a little better; now these curtains must come down, and I may as well shut the shutters too – and now this tablecloth must be content to hang straight, and mamma’s box and the books must lie in their places and not all helter-skelter. (10)

While her mother rests, Ellen moves about the room inventorying the various domestic artifacts and bestowing order on the scene. Her labor here, Warner relates, is the “result of her experiment” with rousing the fire and warming the room; having accomplished that Ellen gains confidence in her ability to complete tasks in place of her sick mother. Though she labors for her own amusement, her dialogue reflects the care which she transfers on to her mother’s belongings. In *Sentimental Materialism*, Lori Merish explains that this kind of domestic illustration impregnates characters with “the signs of civility and refinement” and “[indicates] whether an individual ‘cares for’ his or her possessions” (139). Warner employs this ethic in her first illustration of Ellen’s domestic work. Personifying the chair – “go back to your places” –

and the other objects in the room, Ellen interacts as though she is playing with an assembly of toys which she can order around and manipulate. Because Ellen arranges the table and the room based on her own imaginary understanding of her mother's ideal domestic space, her childhood play reveals her emotional attachment to her mother's things (as well as her mother) and their parlor. In this passage, then, domestic order and sentiment collide. Labor becomes a sentimental function and the commodity is impregnated with sentimental affection.

Ellen further demonstrates her domestic and sentimental aptitudes when she prepares tea and toast for her mother with a religious and care-wrought precision. Warner writes, "To make her mother's tea was Ellen's regular business. She treated it as a very grave affair, and loved it as one of the pleasantest in the course of the day" (13). Through this ritual, Warner demonstrates that domestic labor conveys sentiment. Warner is careful to distinguish the "regular," appropriate domestic work from tasks that would be inappropriate, working class tasks. Though Ellen "prepares" the tea, a "servant" brings the "tea-things" (Warner 13). Ellen's careful preparation here and love of her "regular business" reverses the typical domestic structure: Ideal domesticity places the mother in the position of laborer for the love of her children, hence the cult of republican motherhood which emphasizes the training of girls to labor as mothers, but here Ellen, an "angel in the household," labors to care for her sick mother. Ellen thus appears as a mother or wife in training, learning to managing the household as an arbiter of domestic order. Appropriate domestic work takes place in the parlor and connects Ellen to her future as a wife and mother rather than her future as a wage earner.

Warner contrasts the moments of domestic felicity enjoyed in the urban middle class parlor with the work Ellen performs in the pastoral residence of her Aunt Fortune Emerson in Thirlwall. This setting provides Ellen with a new cast of grievances, not least among which is her

exposure to working-class labor. Here we see Ellen's middle-class pretensions toward female work defined by her aversion to her Aunt Fortune's rustic, subsistence lifestyle and her demands on Ellen. In the first few interactions between Ellen and Fortune, Warner parallels the early scenes that displayed Ellen's creditable tea making skills with Fortune's own masterful cooking skills as she prepares pork gravy "as if by magic" under Ellen's watchful gaze (105). In *Domestic Individualism*, Gillian Brown examines "the disguise ... of labor as magic" in relationship to "invisible labor" (77). Here, Warner characterizes labor as anti-agential yet demonstrates the positive potential of productive domestic labor to appear divine or supernatural. No sooner does Ellen witness this moment by the warm fire than she is directed to a "cellar-like room" to wash herself under a cold spout. Warner operates by building moments of stark contrasts to remind the reader, and Ellen, that her socioeconomic position in life has changed. Now that she is on the farm, Ellen must complete the tasks that the invisible wage laborer completed for her in her urban home and fetch her own water. While Fortune exhibits a creative force through her domestic efforts, Ellen's task reveals the morose reduction of her daily duties.

Along with this alteration, Ellen becomes objectified by her Aunt's industrial demand for labor and the deferment of Ellen's education to that demand. Warner writes, "[Ellen] was runner of errands and maid of all work ; to set the table and clear it was only a trifle in the list of her every-day duties; and they were not ended till the last supper dish was put away and the hearth swept up. Miss Fortune never spared herself and never spared Ellen, so long as she had any occasion for her" (337-8). Ellen spends these moments dreaming of her return to the Humphreys, thinking about her mother, and reminding herself that these trials lead to spiritual resolve. The sentimental attachment that Ellen exhibited in the work she does for her mother and the Humphreys is denied to her Aunt Fortune whom she determines not to love. This leads Warner

to detail contrasting images of domestic labor – in the parlor and in the kitchen – to uncover appropriate female exposure to work: laboring for love as “an angel in the household” and strenuous labor which she experiences at Aunt Fortune’s house.

Aunt Fortune presents a model for the agrarian womanhood defined by her industry and capability, and she also demonstrates industrial and capitalistic attitudes towards labor. Though vilified by Ellen, Fortune initially appears as an effective manager of domestic order. Of her house, Warner writes, “The kitchen was all put in order, the hearth swept, the irons at the fire, and Miss Fortune just pinning her ironing blanket on the table” (108). For Fortune, the kitchen is the locus of her authority, but her command is by no means confined to that space; Fortune is a capable and shrewd business woman who runs her farm with her worker and future husband, the Dutchman, Mr. Van Brunt. She fully demonstrates her rural industrial tendencies when she defies the social codes of a bee and invites her neighbors to assist in two tasks under the counsel of Van Brunt: “let ’em pare apples in one room and cut pork in t’other” (231). Revealing her frugal, business minded predispositions, Fortune adds, “I’ll have it so. But I won’t have ’em to tea, mind you; I’d rather throw apples and all into the fire at once. I’ll have but one plague of setting tables, and that. I won’t have ’em to tea. I’ll make it up to ’em in the supper though” (232). Her syllogistic reflection on the merits of the bee’s output mirrors industrial financial gains models. Fortune’s house thus develops into an economic space as well as a domestic one.

Despite her initial sensitivity towards labor, Ellen encroaches in Fortune’s economic world as she takes on the responsibility of managing the household when Fortune falls ill, standing in as a temporary but less effective matriarch. Labor, though a necessary companion of the middle-class woman’s life, better aligns with the duties of the working class. In fact, a “true woman” – of middle class identity – can only endure so much as Ellen reveals through this trial:

“there was a measure of care constantly upon Ellen’s mind; she felt charged with the welfare of all about the house; and under the effort to meet the charge, joined to the unceasing bodily exertion, she grew thin and pale” (363). Excessive labor also detracts from a woman’s opportunity for moral and intellectual growth; a “true woman” must necessarily balance labor with religion and education. Ellen’s access to her study and spiritual material suffers at this time: “Her morning hour of prayer was very precious now; and her Bible grew more and more dear” (363). In this way, Warner illustrates varying images of domestic labor to uncover appropriate and inappropriate female exposure to work.

The particulars of Ellen’s labor on the farm additionally connect her to working-class, industrial labor. In her aunt’s absence, Ellen continues the domestic side of the farm work by churning butter. Butter making is an appropriate symbol of agricultural industrial products made primarily by women in the early nineteenth century. Joanne M. Jennison explains, “farm women established butter as a farm product with a steady market and stable price” (816). Ellen’s work in the buttery both connects her with inappropriate working class labor and implicates her in the production of a commodity that is traded in public capitalist markets. Though Ellen works in a small domestically located buttery, her work here places her in the impasse between public and private. Warner employs the male gaze to expose the inappropriateness of Ellen’s work here. When Ellen is thus employed, Mr. Marshman (a close acquaintance of her adopted family the Humphreys) and Alice come in an attempt to take her away, and when unsuccessful Mr. Marshman checks Ellen with a subtle reproach:

Mr. Marshman wanted to know what she meant by swallowing, herself up in an apron in that sort of way? so Ellen had him into the buttery and showed him what she had been about. He would see her skim several pans, and laughed at her

prodigiously; though there was a queer look about his eyes, too, all the time.

(Warner 373)

Mr. Marshman lends a patriarchal authority to this scene. His “queer [looks]” serve as a subtle reproach for the labor Ellen performs here, suggesting that her work in this scene moves beyond the domestic and begins to encroach on impertinent work performed as a more public labor. Mr. Marshman thus silently reprimands her for this impropriety.

The work that Ellen practices in her urban home and the work that she experiences on Fortune’s farm both set her up for the labor she encounters when she attempts to “take Alice’s place” in the Humphrey household following her death (459). Alice, the sickly sister of John Humphrey and Ellen’s first close acquaintance in Thirwall, demonstrates a bourgeois form of domestic labor defined by its invisibility as well as its sentimental merit. Typically cast in her glass hot house, Alice’s domestic work seems confined to needle work and other idle tasks, requisite of her fragile health; yet following her death, the Humphrey’s housekeeper Margery, in response to Ellen’s entreaties to take on Alice’s work, reveals, “there was a thousand little things that I’d only recollect at the minute; she’d set the table for me when my hands was uncommon full; and often she’d come out and make some little thing for the master when I wouldn’t have time to do the same myself” (461). During her short stay in the Humphrey household, Ellen lends visibility to the domestic work of the middle class “mistress of the house” through her “new round of little household duties” (464, 463); among her duties, Warner reveals, Ellen skimmed cream, mended clothes, served coffee to her adopted brother and father, and by and by began to dust and put in to order the books in Mr. Humphrey’s study (464). Ellen emulates variant forms of domestic labor, each of which indicates her movement through stratified social and economic circumstances.

Appropriate female work centers on domestic order rather than domestic production. Proper domesticity dictates that women maintain precise order over a household, as Aunt Fortune does with her kitchen. Brown argues, “The manifest Destiny of American women to domesticate and Christianize the world can be realized through the work they perform in their homes. Uniformity and neatness in the kitchen matter profoundly, since these habits create a standard of harmony for America” (20). As a young girl, however, Ellen doesn’t yet have a household, but the maintenance of her possessions prepares her for that eventual task. Thus testifying to the importance of arrangement, Ellen maintains the strict organization of her possessions.

To buttress the emphasis placed on the importance of personal belongings, Ellen suffers the disruption of her interior domestic order at the hands of her Aunt who dyes her socks and Nancy who disturbs her possessions. Warner builds the crisis of this moment by juxtaposing Ellen’s introduction into style and consumption, instilled by her mother, with the lifestyle shift that she endures at Fortunes. Early in the novel, her mother introduces Ellen to the tenets of “true womanhood,” proclaiming, “And if you ever go an hour with a hole in your stocking, or a tear in your dress, or a string off your petticoat, I hope the sight of your work-box will make you blush” (38). With these standards in mind, Ellen is ill prepared to conform to a life where white stockings seem imprudent, particularly to Fortune who is tasked with washing them. Warner introduces this conflict with a tinge of irony; she states, “Ellen had the pleasure of finding out the mystery of the brass kettle and the white maple bark” (114). Any pleasure on Ellen’s part is subsequently diminished when the intensely domestic Fortune sets herself to work on Ellen’s pure white stockings: “Then, tucking up her sleeves to the elbows, [Miss Fortune] fished up pair after pair out of the kettle, and wringing them out hung them on chairs to dry. But, as Ellen had

opined, they were no longer white, but of a fine slate colour” (114). This scene further serves to demonstrate Fortune’s intolerance of Ellen’s urban, middle-class pretensions towards dress and behavior.

Nancy, the “bold black [eyed]” girl, intrudes in Ellen’s domestic space to torment her as she lies in bed with a fever (116). Warner casts Nancy as a typical trickster and all around bad girl early on, but her ne’er do good antics reach their climax in this distressing scene where Nancy not only rummages through Ellen’s belongings as well as Aunt Fortune’s, but she also encroaches on Ellen’s physical body as she attempts to force-feed her gruel. Distressed, Ellen entreats Nancy to desist, stating, “they’re all in nice order and you’ll get them all in confusion” (213). Throughout the encounter, Ellen, who is pictured with her “little hymn book . . . clasped in her hand,” becomes the model of emergent womanhood (Warner 210); while Nancy appears as “the wild, unrestrained, poor girl who exists outside the bounds of true womanhood” (Ashworth 13). Both Nancy and Fortune attempt to perform “domestic labor” but, as they have no respect for the way objects (like socks) constitute the self (or where labor ends and people begin), they aren’t practicing the proper form of domestic labor.

Labor functions as a primary indicator of class relations throughout the novel. Ellen reveals a privileged access to appropriate forms of domestic labor, which mark her for a future of domestic management as a wife. Warner devalues alternate forms of domestic labor that encroach too far into the public world of capitalist production. Her consistent enumerations with market commodities that convey “care” and allow women access to domestic management complicates the separate sphere construct that Warner builds through her illustration of labor. The result of Ellen’s relationship to domestic objects and labor is that she, as a domestic female,

must reconcile her responsibility toward her middle class identity and her responsibilities as a domestic laborer.

CHAPTER II: GIFTED COMMODITIES AND MARKET EVASIONS

To acquire and maintain domestic commodities is an additional form of acceptable, compulsory labor. At its heart, female consumption offers women the freedom to construct their domestic space and inscribe themselves with a singular identity. Brown explains, “the motivating condition for consumer spending” is that “the commodity makes us want it for our self-completion” (51). In domestic fiction, “self-completion” is synonymous with domestic organization. Thus, consumer practices become a necessary “labor” in the completion or construction of domestic spaces, a space that embodies the female identity. Warner seeks to separate the commodity from its industrial past and re-identifies it based on the function it performs in the home. Female consumption, as it is displayed in *The Wide, Wide World*, reveals the tension between consumer and domestic ideologies. Both Ellen and her mother participate in market consumption, yet Warner gives the women limited access to the market by introducing male mediators.

The Wide, Wide World reveals a deeply intricate economic world. In the first line of the novel, Warner discloses the inciting crisis that prematurely separates, forever, Mrs. Montgomery from her young daughter: “Mama,” Ellen asks, “what was that I heard papa, saying to you this morning about his lawsuit?” (1). Warner immediately introduces Ellen as a character who is intensely affected by the public, business world of men represented here by the lawsuit. This question goes unanswered for some time as her mother lays down to rest, knowing that in the answering of that question both she and Ellen will expel precious energy in the shedding of tears, and Ellen takes about the room to interact in her isolated domestic world. When her mother rejoins her, Ellen learns that her father has lost the lawsuit and with it his family’s financial security. Now poor, he determines that he and his frail wife must move to Europe to seek new

financial opportunities and leave their daughter behind. This decision effectively destroys the middle-class American home and destabilizes the private community of women fostered through the mother-daughter relationship. Though an ineffective patriarch, Captain Montgomery's decision remains unchallenged; Mrs. Montgomery imparts, "though we must sorrow, we must not rebel" (12). This testament frames Ellen's movement throughout the entire novel; she encounters every authority figure with relentless obedience. Though in the first chapter Warner exhaustively describes Ellen in her quiet domestic sphere, this opening line reveals the confluence of the public and private spheres and the father forces both women out of the safe domestic setting and into the consumer world.

However, it is Mrs. Montgomery, and not Ellen's father, who introduces Ellen to the wide world of consumerism. A skilled shopper, Mrs. Montgomery begins to educate her daughter in the art of shopping. She first takes her daughter to purchase a Bible, the most important item "necessary to the keeping up of good habits" (32). Ellen approaches the task "as though a nation's fate were deciding" (30). Through this ironic remark, Warner connects the domestic and the public spheres and associates Ellen with the antebellum cult of republican motherhood. Religion and spirituality, represented here by the Bible, is fostered in the domestic sphere but permeates into the public sphere through the education that young men attain in the home; as a future mother, Ellen's access to religion and literacy will figure into the public space through her sons who will take part in deciding the nation's fate as voting citizens. Thus, Warner begins to play with the idea of the Bible and spirituality as a commodity that can be transferred to individuals – both the physical Bible and its contents become variant forms of the commodity that can be inherited. She suggests that this particular purchase will literally factor in to a "nation's fate" and will become the vehicle by which Ellen learns "good habits" and later

transfers those habits to her children. Mrs. Montgomery confirms this connection when in the Bible she inscribes, “I will be a God to thee, and thy seed after thee” (43).⁸ These words, Warner reveals, were “not for [Ellen]” but rather for Mrs. Montgomery herself (43). This verse invokes a perpetual covenant and implicates generations present and future in perpetuating the covenant of God which thrives in domestic practice through reproduction and education.

Mrs. Montgomery provisions Ellen with all of the necessities for domestic womanhood – items for the purpose of domestic labor; and items, like clothing, that function to preserve femininity. For Ellen, who lacks the knowledge and decisiveness to make prudent purchasing decisions, selecting a Bible proves to be a most difficult and time consuming task. Mrs. Montgomery therefore intervenes for the first time: “Mrs. Montgomery came to her help, for it was plain Ellen had lost the power of judging amidst so many tempting objects” (32). Warner continues to build moments of intervention throughout the rest of the mother daughter shopping excursion, and through these interventions Mrs. Montgomery not only educates Ellen in the particulars of the market, she also continues her domestic work in a public space. Ellen approaches the next store with as much zeal as she had the first:

It was the first time she had ever seen the inside of such a store; and the articles displayed on every side completely bewitched her. From one thing to another she went, admiring and wondering; in her wildest dreams she had never imagined such beautiful things. The store was fairy-land. (32)

Warner illustrates the “bewitching” power of the consumer world. Upon observing Ellen’s response to the store, Mrs. Montgomery immediately “[attends] to business” and leaves her

⁸ King James Version: Genesis 17:7, “And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.” The Bible retains deeper levels of sentimental meaning which I will discuss later.

daughter to admire all the fine commodities (33). Mrs. Montgomery then directs Ellen to focus her attention on one task, to furnish a writing desk, and she persuades her daughter to make sensible buying decisions by dwelling on the utility of each commodity. The mother and daughter's interaction in the market begins to mirror their domestic relationship, where Mrs. Montgomery constantly preaches moderation and forbearance. She thus directs her daughter away from expensive luxury commodities, stating, "Your desk will be furnished with every thing really useful. Merely showy matters we can dispense with" (33). Mrs. Montgomery primarily uses the market to teach her daughter economic prudence.

Because the market is an entity devoid of human sympathy, Warner undercuts the significance of Ellen's consumer education by "fetishizing" and re-identifying the commodity as a gift or keepsake – tokens that retain sentiment. Brown argues, "Commodity fetishism hides the real character of the commodity, its life as labor, its origin in the economic relations among persons" (51). Warner participates in commodity fetishism in her text, imbuing the commodity with sentiment and a "sense of empathy" to rid it of its history in industrial labor and make it ready for a new kind of labor – a domestic or sentimental labor (Brown 51). Once in the market and subsequently in the home, material goods become saturated with a new identity – a sentimental identity – that makes the producer invisible. Ellen's socks and her Bible become atypical keepsakes that retain sentiment yet also connect Ellen to the economic world of the market. To effectively exorcise capitalistic values from the home, and therefore relieve the domestic identity from participation in capitalism, Warner instills the commodity with "characterological import" and thereby sentimentalizes the object (Merish 2).

Warner primarily undercuts consumer practices with the introduction of the keepsake as an embodied form of emotion separate from domestic material consumption. Obscuring the line

between what is specifically sentimental and what is specifically functional and domestic, Mrs. Montgomery sells her mother's ring to supplement the money that her husband left to be spent on the necessary commodities for Ellen's future rearing. As well as an economic transaction, the ring signifies the exchange of "affectional memory" inherent in the "keepsake tradition" (Dobson 273). Upon selling the ring, Mrs. Montgomery states, "Jewels in themselves are the merest nothings to me," but Warner reveals, "There were tears, however, in Mrs. Montgomery's eyes, that showed the sacrifice had cost her something and there were tears in Ellen's that told it was not thrown away upon her" (29). The present economic exchange facilitates the transference of sympathy: Ellen's "tears" at the event of her mother's "sacrifice" demonstrates "multivalenced" sentimental consumption; as she observes her mother mourn her material connection to her own mother, Ellen is instructed in the practice of sentimental exchange. This scene demonstrates sentimental consumption beyond material exchange. Her mother, thus, becomes an *item* of consumption for Ellen as well as her teacher in consumer and sentimental practices. Shortly thereafter she exchanges her ring for the red Bible, a token of moral necessity, among other items meant primarily for Ellen's education in all things social and domestic (Warner 32). The red Bible, which Ellen picks because it resembles her mother's own Bible, becomes a sentimental keepsake of sorts – it is the item by which Ellen remembers her mother in body and in faith as she endures their separation and ultimately mourns her death. As a sentimental keepsake, the Bible connects Ellen to her mother and begins to lay the groundwork for a private community of women connected by their moral sensibilities. To conclude their excursion in the market, Warner writes that Ellen abandoned her "boxes" or gifts and "took her old place by her mother's sofa" (43). Their interaction in the store reveals that women can remain "women" despite their entry

into the public market, yet only if they retain the sensibility and sentimentality that thrives in the home.

While Warner critiques the market in her sentimentalization of the commodities both Ellen and Mrs. Montgomery buy, she does not fully destabilize the importance of the masculine figure as mediator. Mrs. Montgomery relinquishes her mother's ring to acquire "certain things which she thought important to [her daughter's] comfort and improvement," marking the first and most stark example of material and sentimental exchange in Warner's novel (30). The mother's sacrifice here not only demonstrates a woman's capability to participate in consumer markets but also illustrates Captain Montgomery's failure to preserve male authority and act as an intermediary between women and the market. Through Montgomery, Warner begins to build a definition of ideal white manhood which is underscored by a man's ability to manage women and contribute to the development of true womanhood. In *From Gift to Commodity*, Hildegard Hoeller argues, "The emotional and economic failure of the father ... [forces] the two women to participate in both private and public spheres" (87). Accordingly, Mrs. Montgomery must sell her ring in order to supplement the insufficient amount of money he allotted for Ellen's provisioning. The ring alternately provides Mrs. Montgomery with purchasing power and economic autonomy independent of her husband. Captain Montgomery appears as a failed patriarch who, in his inability to safeguard femininity and womanhood, pushes his wife into the public world. Mrs. Montgomery, having sold her ring "after a little chaffering ... for eighty dollars, being about three-quarters of its real value," demonstrates her ability to participate in the inhospitable market world that devalues sentimental attachment and strictly monetizes Ellen's inheritance (29). Warner rectifies the inhospitality of the market through Ellen's tears and the subsequent gifts.

Like her mother, Ellen ventures into the market unguarded, yet her interaction in stores requires more authoritative, male intervention. Realizing that her mother is too ill to continue the “business” of shopping for her material necessities, Ellen entreats her mother to allow her to undertake the task independently. Mrs. Montgomery opines, “but a great deal of skill and experience is necessary for a shopper,” and Ellen’s subsequent experience proves that she not only lacks the skill but also the authority necessary to command the market world (44). Upon entering the department store in search for merino, Warner relates,

[Ellen] felt confused, and almost confounded, by the incessant hum of voices, and moving crowd of strange people all around her, while her little figure stood alone and unnoticed in the midst of them; and there seemed no prospect that she would be able to gain the ear or the eye of a single person. (46)

This illustration creates a stark contrast with the “fairy land” Ellen first encountered in the market. Warner uses this scene to remind the reader that the market is an improper place for women. Ellen enters the inhospitable world of the department store and encounters Mr. Saunders, the malevolent store clerk, who, “dissatisfied” with having to serve a child, insults Ellen’s imperfect knowledge of the cost-quality relationship of commodities and abandons her to a solitary corner of the merino counter (47). Judging the inferior value of Ellen’s purchasing power and judiciousness, Mr. Saunders inflates the cost of the various merino linens higher than their actual price which not only derails Ellen but also introduces her to the cutthroat, capitalist world of the market. Through Ellen’s solitary engagement in the department store, Warner reminds the reader that the consumer world is an uncongenial space for the emergent true woman.

Unable to survive in the capitalist world but unwilling to fail, Ellen finds a savior in the form of an unnamed gentleman “protector” who intervenes in the situation and “sees her scathless” through the market (52). Mr. Saunders and the unnamed gentleman reveal the capitalist, market world to be a predatory space characterized by the pricing authority of the market and superiority of the male consumer. Through their short encounter, Warner introduces the first scene of dueling masculinity wherein the malicious representative of the capitalist world, Mr. Saunders, relents the power he exercised over Ellen to the Gentleman consumer who, through his purchasing power, eclipses the clerk in authority and importance. The male consumer therefore becomes the primary authoritative figure in the novel; Warner suggests that his authority must necessarily be used to insulate women from the abuses of a capitalist world.

Gifts become the primary method by which men mediate the market for Ellen and ultimately remove her from it. As they traverse the market, Ellen’s gentleman “protector” quickly turns from chaperone to gift-giver. He first buys her an extra piece of merino, and he responds to Ellen’s reservations with a “Pho, pho ... your mother has nothing to do with this; this is my affair” (53). His gifts are not without utility; he purchases her fabric, a bonnet, and finally birds to eat. While the birds are meant for Mrs. Montgomery, they are signed “*for Miss Ellen*” (54). These gifts allow Ellen to participate in commodity exchange without having to enter into the marketplace. Hildegard Hoeller argues that Warner “[examines] the significance of various gift rituals as alternative economic spaces to market capitalism” (85). Though a brief character, the gentleman enacts Ellen’s official removal from the public market. His final gift, a parade of different birds, lengthens the women’s domestic isolation and saves them from the inconvenience of the market.

John Humphrey, the ultimate figure of ideal white manhood and Ellen's future husband, perpetuates these "gift rituals" with the introduction of *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Like the Bible, *The Pilgrim's Progress* serves as an atypical literary keepsake. After receiving the novel, Warner writes, "[Ellen's] attention was nailed; the listless, careless mood in which she sat down was changed for one of rapt delight" (354). Warner employs similar language in this scene as in the illustration of Ellen receiving her gifts from her mother in the department store. She receives her mother's gifts with "fingers trembling" and "eagerness"; similarly, Ellen engages this book, which she "devours" in a state of "rapt delight," revealing the affective and erotic nature of consumption (354). Yet, Warner assigns a vested sentimental emphasis to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which Ellen counts "as her greatest treasure next to her little red Bible," and she rescues the book from the level of base commodity through a gift transaction (374). Warner uses the "gift ritual" to remove the commodity further from its origin in market driven industrialism yet she instills in Ellen's books a deeper sentimental import than that assigned to gifts – she marks the book as an additional literary keepsake, a vehicle for sentimental attachment and affectional memory. On its pages, John left Ellen "a great many notes—simple, short, plain, exactly what was needed to open the whole book to her and make it of the greatest possible use and pleasure" (373). This exchange lays the foundation for John and Ellen's future romantic relationship. John purviews the book and inscribes himself onto the pages so that he, too, is "open" to her. The book thus becomes a multivalenced item of "pleasure" and an embodied keepsake.

Warner's illustrations of labor and the marketplace demonstrate a preoccupation with the changing market economy and the shifting positions of women within it. While she values class appropriate labor and commodities in her critique of the market, she undermines women's public

and economic autonomy. She rectifies the inherent evils of the unfeeling, inanimate market by presenting men who can interfere and traverse the market on a woman's behalf. The commodities' greatest value lies in their potential to function as a gift. Ellen's final and most important gift, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, embodies Ellen's spiritual journey and chronicles her relationship with John. He gives her the book from the position as teacher and future suitor. In the story, these two roles collide as John begins to define appropriate female qualities and sensibilities.

CHAPTER III: SENTIMENTAL PRIVACY

Ellen's engagement with labor and the public, capitalist market are implicated in the developing definitions for womanhood and proper domestic work that the novel explores. The imperfect female autonomy exhibited by Ellen and her mother in the marketplace is subsequently held under the male gaze, demonstrating that men function to control the public market and protect women from within its borders. Men contribute to the definition of true womanhood. Appropriate masculinity becomes implicated in men's ability to safeguard female practices (sentimentality, dress). However, while the male protector who guides Ellen through the market contributes to the safeguarding of femininity and womanhood, white manhood comes to be defined in the novel not by successful male mediation of the market but rather in their domestic management in the home. The male characters in the novel use their domestic authority to define ideal womanhood and mold Ellen into their vision of the proper woman.

Warner prefaces Ellen's departure from home by exploring the implications of failed manhood and its effect on female communities. Though Captain Montgomery, a man "not readily touched by anything," had been primarily absent from the story and presumably from Ellen's life, he oversees the particulars of her departure (62). The captain's greatest flaw lies in his inability to understand the sentimental connection between his wife and daughter. Warner reveals that he "[moved] about the room as leisurely as if he had nothing more to do than get ready for breakfast" (62). Despite his wife's distress, he feels very little for the loss of his daughter and prolongs her sleep out of convenience to himself: "He had in truth delayed on purpose, wishing the final leave-taking to be as brief as possible" (Warner 62). He functions under the mistaken belief that "hurry and bustle" will reduce the amount of stress to mother and daughter, yet their unnecessary separation heightens the grief of both (60). Instead of preserving

the sentimental moment, he incites a jarring chasm in the family. The captain, moreover, demonstrates his inability to prepare Ellen for the journey as he initially leaves behind her bonnet and gloves – a mistake Mrs. Montgomery would never make. Upon leaving her urban home, Ellen realizes that she left her gloves behind, and Warner blames Captain Montgomery, who “overlooked the gloves in his hurry,” exposing Ellen to ridicule of her female travel companions (65).⁹

Thus rushed out of the door, Ellen finds herself ill prepared to engage in the female communities outside of her familial relationships. The first women Ellen encounters are Margaret Dunscombe, Mrs. Dunscombe and their maid. These women mock Ellen’s bonnet and ridicule her gloveless hands. Margaret states, “any body would think she had come out of the woods, and no gloves too; I shouldn’t like to have the Miss M’Arthurs think she belonged to us” (67). This ridicule marks Ellen as unfit to participate in their social circle and effectively alienates her from her companions. However, Mrs. Dunscombe’s insults maintain a more heightened irony in the novel, for her ridicules bespeak the indignity of a woman – and a mother – who contributes to the juvenile abuses of an orphaned girl. Moreover, Warner clearly emphasizes that Ellen is dressed based on her mother’s preferred, simple style whereas Mrs. Dunscombe’s propensity towards grander or more popular styles emphasize her own inappropriate attachment to consumer, rather than sentimental, customs.

To rectify these insults, Warner introduces another gentleman (unnamed at first and later revealed to be Mr. Marshman) to intervene in her private affairs with her female companions. Through Mr. Marshman, Warner enacts a critique against the feminine predilection towards style

⁹ The captain continues this trend of insensibility throughout the novel. His final instructions to his daughter dictate her removal to her distant and alien family in Scotland and causes, once again, her separation from her home and family, the Humphreys. Warner closes the narrative of this man as one “among those lost in the ill-fated Duc d’ Orleans” whose death receives little attention and absolutely no tears (in a novel rife with tears) (507).

and consumption in place of moral fortitude. Throughout the course of their interactions, Mr. Marshman counsels Ellen on religion and her maternal loss. When he notices the state of the bonnet that she has cast off, he asks, “Will you be ashamed of what she approved, because some people that haven’t probably half her sense choose to make merry with it?” (80). Mr. Marshman’s gentle inquiries and later counsels function to place Ellen’s mother back at the center of social and moral authority as he commands, “If your mother says a thing is right, that’s enough for you” (80). Though they interact in a public space, Mr. Marshman transforms the boat into an intimate setting where he checks Ellen’s incomplete understanding of womanhood and then undertakes to offer her spiritual counsel on forbearance. Mr. Marshman’s invokes maternal authority and denigrates the importance of female inclinations towards style to begin to build a comprehensive definition of “true womanhood.”

Mr. Marshman proves to be an effective patriarch for modeling appropriate female conduct with regards to Ellen. During the Christmas season, Ellen and the Humphreys travel to Mr. Marshman’s house, and Ellen finds herself once again in the company of Margaret Dunscombe along with a group of young children. Ellen accidentally slights Margaret after being shown a present that she received and proclaiming that she “would rather have the money” (321). The petulant Margaret calls Mr. Marshman to out the “avaricious” Ellen (321). Mr. Marshman thus gives Ellen for her New Year’s present a bank note as a gift, disclosing the negative influence of the pervading consumer culture. Mr. Marshman’s inquiries suggest that he knows better than to believe Margaret, yet he involves himself in their childish fight. The situation provides him with the opportunity to exercise patriarchal authority. He censures Ellen’s potential engagement with public, monetary markets and checks her for overstepping the line between proper domestic interaction and public interaction. Money and monetary exploits put tension on

the relationship between public and private spheres. Though Warner suggests that knowledge of the market is a necessary quality in a domestic female, she reveals that material and monetary desire injures the female image and moral superiority. Though having money implies economic freedom, Warner reveals the impropriety of a monetary gift. Ellen proclaims, “‘I don’t care what you do with it, sir,’ said Ellen, laughing, though in imminent danger of bursting into tears – ‘I am very glad it is out of *my* hands’” (331). Rejecting the money ensures that Ellen preserves her pure womanhood against the injunction of prostitution and perpetuates her continued reliance on her male counterparts to keep her within the bounds of true womanhood.

This reliance on an authoritative, patriarchal guardian is made further manifest in the manner with which John exercises spatial control over Ellen. Rather than reengage with consumer markets, Ellen resigns herself to the specifically private sphere, and John pushes against her autonomy by placing her within his constant gaze. Warner reveals: “Of one thing [Ellen] was perfectly sure, whatever [John] might be doing, that he heard her; and equally sure that if anything were not right she would sooner or later hear of it. But this was a censorship Ellen rather loved than feared” (466). Here, John’s domestic management extends into the management of Ellen’s physical body and begins to take on a much more sexualized tone. Though Warner illustrates this censorship as a positive restriction for Ellen, her ability to operate as a female with autonomous access to education and ability (to essentially learn from her own mistakes) is stifled by John’s persistent presence. Moreover, Ellen reveals the dichotomy inherent in such omnipresent surveillance as something to be either “loved” or “feared,” suggesting that under such restrictive circumstances women either have ultimate protection or risk exposure, and possibly rape. Within the protective confines of the Humphrey’s home, Ellen

who “rather loved than feared” her surveillor reveals the beginning of a romantic attachment (466).

John focuses his management of Ellen through his surveillance of her education and his censorship of her reading. He advocates the antebellum “anti-novel discourse” (Brady 721), which stressed that reading sentimental fiction further complicated the boundaries between public and private, placing women within dangerous proximity to public, political spaces. According to Brady, anti-novel commentators “tellingly balanced their imagination of novel reading on a knife’s edge between the solitary and the social, between the isolating tendencies and the unifying power of emotive reading” (721). Thus, novel reading was perceived of as a public if not political act specifically marketed towards women through the circulation of sentimental fiction. These restrictions, and Warner’s insistence for moderation, extends into Warner’s depiction of scholastic education, specifically regarding the act of reading.

Anti-novel rhetoric functions in two different ways in Warner’s novel: to reduce emotive stimuli and to promote proper female education. Doctor Green introduces this rhetoric when he worries that Mrs. Montgomery might have been “reading some furious kind of a novel” (19). His concern arises from the assumption that sentimental novels stimulate emotional stress. John furthers this rhetoric; his aversion to novels is, in fact, so strong that he commands her to “read no novels” as one of his three charges when they separate at the end of the story, which also includes corresponding with him and eventually marrying him (568). Though he never explicitly states the purpose behind his crusade against novels, Warner likely incorporates it in response to the circulating suspicion of novel reading that she encountered. Through a discourse between Ellen Chauncey and her mother, Warner exposes the concern that stories hinder education:

“but what is the reason Ellen is so much better read in history than you?”

“I don’t know, mamma, unless – I wish I wasn’t so fond of reading stories.”

(421)

Tracing the role of reading throughout *The Wide, Wide World*, Suzanne Ashworth explains that women should “read solely to cultivate her moral and intellectual faculties” rather than read with “pedantic ambition or intemperate delight” (6). She claims, “appropriate female reading was supposed to initiate and advance a systematic quest for self-improvement, moral betterment, and an ever-receding horizon of ideality” (6). Sentimentality emerges out of an incongruous rhetoric that vilifies fiction yet uses novels as its primary vehicle for representation. On the one hand, consumerism reinforces sentimental ideologies, but the sentimental doctrine venerates temperance and abstinence from emotive stimuli like sentimental novels.

In Warner’s novel, John’s management of Ellen’s reading reveals proper and improper forms of consumption. This censorship persists throughout the novel and into the unpublished chapter as Ellen surrenders her agency to John who largely controls the spatial arrangement of the private setting as well as her placement within it. Her physical orientation to John at quintessential points in the novel reveals the extent to which masculine authority manipulates domestic spaces. His manipulation of her surrounding also invokes a heavy handed patriarchal framework to their marriage. Shamir explains that “the values of masculine privatism were ultimately understood to override those associated with feminine domesticity” (16). The final unpublished chapter discloses the depth to which John impacts Ellen’s physical orientation. Warner reveals, “After the Library John proposed that Ellen should visit *her room*” (574). Her room, she explains, is situated so that it may only be accessed by way of John’s study. Ellen exclaims, “How delightfully private this room is – having no other entrance but through other rooms where no one can intrude” (577). The room contained relics of the outside world that

reinforce domestic mores, like the painting of the Madonna and Child. The setting confines Ellen to a particularly private space through which she can only engage in the public sphere through the objects that John selected to furnish her room. Her knowledge of both spheres is limited to the material objects that John exposes her to. Because Ellen lacks the agency to participate in the public world unattended, John designates the limits of her spatial orientation as well as her intellectual or mental orientation. Through Ellen's relationship to material objects in the domestic setting, Warner exhibits the manifold restrictions imposed on white, middle-class females of that time period.

In contrast to the rhetoric of temperance and abstinence championed by John, Warner introduces Mr. Lindsay who offers a variant, perverted form of womanhood. With the Lindsay family, Ellen is exposed to dangerous forms of consumption – alcohol – and she experiences uncomfortable forms of intimacy and intrusion without consent. Warner reveals, “When Mr. Lindsay was present he was not satisfied without having Ellen in his arms or close beside him” (508). Mr. Lindsay subjects Ellen to a new, more intrusive level of surveillance as he attempts to exorcise her memory of previous adopted home and family by overwhelming Ellen with his invasive affection. While with John, Ellen conforms to his idea of intimacy defined by domestic interiority rather than physical closeness. Ellen secretly rejects Mr. Lindsay's corporeal affection, regarding it as disingenuous; Warner writes, “There was nothing, however, in the character of this fondness, great as it was, that would have inclined any child to presume upon it” (509). These corporeal intrusions extend into Ellen's consumptive habits. Mr. Lindsay commands Ellen to drink wine despite her own wishes. Warner reveals, “That glass of wine looked to Ellen like an enemy marching up to attack her. Because Alice and John did not drink it, she had always, at first without other reason, done the same; and she was determined not to forsake their example

now” (521). Ellen’s attachment to her adopted family appears as the biggest offence that leads Mr. Lindsay to disregard Ellen’s conscience and her consent. Mr. Lindsay proactively attempts to exorcise Ellen’s former friends and modes of conduct – like drinking wine – from her mind.

The Lindsays, particularly Mr. Lindsay’s widowed sister, Lady Keith, advocate a variant form of womanhood, which Ellen recognizes as bad or impure. As an aristocrat and titled woman, Lady Keith prescribes to much more deviant modes of conduct than those which Ellen had observed in her American acquaintances. While Mr. Lindsay reveres her docile obedience (a trait that is much to the advantage of an authority figure like him), Lady Keith laments her “childish” and prudish ways. They, in part, blame her American nationality for her temperate and religious ways. During a short conversation about the American Revolutionary War, Lady Keith proclaims, “She must learn to have no nationality but yours,” and Mr. Lindsay associates her with an American “rebel,” despite her ultimate, if imperfect, obedience to her new “father” (510). This conversation highlights the cultural divisions between her aristocratic, Scottish family and her bourgeois American family and speaks to the persistence of piety and temperance movements which began during the Revolutionary War in the United States.

In her contrast of these two cultures, Warner builds variant definitions for manhood as well. John in his temperance and religion becomes the model for ideal masculinity who is evaluated in contrast to the more unsentimental and intemperate Mr. Lindsay. Because Mr. Lindsay doesn’t understand sentimental attachment, he takes Ellen’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, inscribed “To my little sister,” away purely because it was a gift from John. This instigates their male-on-male competition for Ellen’s affections, a competition which Mr. Lindsay begins as the loser. Warner casts John as an ideal man in terms of his own Christian oriented conduct and by demonstrating Ellen’s unyielding reliance on his guidance. Ellen opines that among the Lindsays

there is no one to “keep [her] right” (566). Warner details John’s tête-à-tête victory over Mr. Lindsay:

Ellen from afar, where she could not hear the words, watched the countenances with great anxiety and great admiration. She could see that while her brother spoke with his usual perfect ease, Mr. Lindsay was embarrassed. She half read the truth. She saw the entire politeness where she also saw the secret discomposure, and she felt that the politeness was forced from him. (571-572)

Although Warner illustrates this competition in terms of its relationship to Ellen’s spirituality and conduct, John’s emergence on the Scotland scene highlights the impropriety of Mr. Lindsay’s corporeal affections and reveals John’s romantic intentions for Ellen. In *National Manhood*, Dana Nelson explains, “Viewed heterosexually – with women as audience, object, and influence – male combat can be read positively, not only as a reproductive good for Christianity and civilization, but as another benign proof of male-female difference” (140-141). Warner employs the female gaze to highlight John’s triumph and male authority and to heighten the “male-female difference.” Ellen essentially becomes commodified in this male competition as each man uses language of ownership over her. Mr. Lindsay commands, “You are mine own now,” and John declares, “I think you belong to me more than to any body” (522, 567). Women and womanhood is again placed at the center of the novel’s crisis.

Warner reveals the importance of the male gaze and “male-female” difference in modeling the true woman. Though Mr. Marshman maintains authoritative patriarchal influences, John emerges as the true man of the novel. Warner signifies John’s access to ideal manhood through his wisdom and status as a “well-made-man” (321). Ellen’s reliance on patriarchal governance or surveillance informed by Christianity (Protestantism) ultimately limits her access

to larger political and social frameworks. One of the limitations imposed by patriarchal guidance is Ellen's restriction from novels. Ironically, Warner condemns the reading of novels – emotive fiction – in *The Wide, Wide World*, yet Warner's readers were clearly not bound by the same restrictions. These limitations, however, lend themselves to a complete illustration of “true womanhood” through Ellen. She accesses womanhood through the codified hegemonic structures imposed by male management and domestic arrangement.

CONCLUSION:

Despite Warner's strict enumeration of separate sphere ideology and pietistic, submissive womanhood, she offers a complex illustration of gendered power relationships in *The Wide, Wide World* that contradicts a simple reading of female submission. Jane Tompkins explains, "Because they lived in a society that celebrated free enterprise and democratic government but were excluded from participating in either, the two questions these female novelists never failed to ask are: what is power, and where is it located?" (160). Tompkins re-identifies what many scholars read as female submission in this novel as the practice of self-command. Joan Dobson applies a similar feminist lens to the issue of power in the novel. She explains that Warner practices subversion through an author/audience relationship, relying on the "conveyance of and empathy for experiences" ("Hidden Hand" 228). While Warner may emphasize "Ellen Montgomery's education into nonrebellion in the face of suffering," as Dobson explains, the novel is also a "study in the nature of power" and abuse ("Hidden Hand" 229). In this way, the psychological detriment of the abuse Ellen suffers, meticulously catalogued by Warner, undercuts the novel's message for feminine obedience – i.e. true womanhood.

My analysis thus furthers the work of Dobson and Tompkins by examining how Warner depicts female power and disempowerment. In my reading, *The Wide, Wide World's* subversive potential is located in its ability to expose the contradictions inherent in the prescribed conduct of the true middle-class woman. In Warner's text, we see how the protocols for middle-class, female conduct prohibit female desire (both consumer and sex-based) even while requiring women to establish their identities through consumer items and dress. Additionally, domestic ideology venerates specific labors yet renders the laborer invisible. Warner lends visibility to female labor and female desire. She demonstrates that women can still be women as they shop

and perform labor. Ellen additionally claims agency through her authority to bestow or withhold sentimental attachment. She consistently demonstrates the power of withholding affection from unworthy characters such as Aunt Fortune and her Scottish family, the Lindsays. Warner imbues Ellen with an affectional ethos, leading the reader and alternate characters to trust her authority to judge a character's sentimental worth. Though Warner gives little explanation to Ellen's immediate dislike of her aunt, those closest to Ellen, the readers and her friends, support Ellen's resolve and sympathize with her trials. Ultimately, Ellen is the primary object of desire in the novel. She experiences desire, both in the market and in the home, and she becomes the object of consumptive desire in the novel for both the alternate characters and the reader. Through her desirability, Ellen maintains a clear authoritative position in the novel.

The commodified female figure thus serves as a corollary to this discussion of power. Like her exclusion from market capitalism and her invisible labor, Ellen's commodification is also subversive in that it exposes Ellen to domestic and corporeal surveillance. Warner's novel, then, demonstrates the tension between the subversive or transformative effort of women to traverse prescriptive boundaries while also attempting to cling to the moral principles imposed by the separate-sphere construct. In *The Wide, Wide World*, Ellen's interaction with consumer markets, her relationship with domestic labor, and her domestic orientation culminates in her eventual marriage and reservation to the private sphere. Warner waveringly pushes against separate-sphere boundaries, at times subverting female separation from a public marketplace and at times reinforcing the value structures that maintain that separation. Ultimately, Warner reveals that consumer exploits and patriarchal influences designated the construction of domestic spaces and placed women in a complicated, intermediary space that offers liberation from the confines of the private sphere yet is bound by patriarchal restrictions.

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