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Puritan Patriarchal Construction of American Sexual Morality and Woman's Worth: A Daughter's Response

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The Thread Tying Us Together: A Fashion and Familial Case Study

By

Savannah Mather

Content Warning: Discussion of Rape, sexual assault, and violence against women. No graphic descriptions

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Note: While the use of “women” in this paper is predominantly used to describe cis women in this paper,

The issues addressed in this paper impact people across a wide variety of gender expressions.

Abstract

While modern conceptions of Puritanism regard it as an artifact of American history, whose woman-killing theologies are long buried and forgotten, the Mather family bible in my father's closet and the recently leaked Supreme Court draft to overturn Roe. Vs. Wade would argue otherwise. Cotton Mather's favorite book *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion* outlined both the ideals and detriments of the Anglo-American female identity. In this text, white women were taught to absolve themselves of the "nakedness" in dress Puritan settlers associated Indigenous people with. A woman's ability to align herself to the ideals of chastity determined her own and her family's reputation, and thus her marriageability and social and financial opportunities through respectability politics. At this time, women were especially vulnerable to being charged with crimes of fornication and concealment following sexual assault or rape. Concealment was the assumed infanticide following a woman hiding evidence of her own pregnancy. While fornication charges resulted in minor fines, a concealment charge could land a woman on the gallows. Thus while men could easily escape the consequences of rape and their sexual immorality, women were dually punished not only by suffering the assault itself, but the punishment received by damaged reputation, fines, and even execution. The theological practice of punishing women more harshly was rooted in their own theology from the book of Genesis when Eve suffers not only the punishment of immense pain through childbirth but of mortal subjugation to her partner Adam. While Cotton Mather believed it was the colonies daughters in

their lewdness and sexual immorality that brought suffering upon the American colonies, his granddaughter, Hannah Mather Crocker, through her texts *Observations on the Real Rights of Women* and *The Midnight Beau* argues instead that young men and their proclivities to drunkenness and committing violence against women and their reputations is the true root of moral decay of the American consciousness.

Research Problem and Definition of Terms

The American colonial Puritans, specifically those of Salem, Massachusetts, are most well-known for the Salem Witch Trials which was a series of prosecutions and executions where fourteen women, five men, and two dogs were put to death for alleged supernatural crimes. (“What Caused the Salem Witch Trials? - JSTOR Daily”) While modern conception tends to romanticize the image of the witch imagining an old woman perched atop a broom with a cat familiar perched on her shoulder, the accused witches of Salem were far from this fantastical image. Rather, the women who stood accused were regular people who were socially ostracized by their community for a myriad of reasons including race, poverty, old age, singleness, bickering with neighbors, or sexual promiscuity. (“Women and Witches: Patterns of Analysis on JSTOR”) While this paper will address these various factors including the intersections of race and class and how they affected the accused women, it will primarily be focused on considering how cultural narratives regarding gender and sexuality contributes to the continued subjugation and devaluation of women in American society.

Popularized by Saint Augustine in his struggle to commit to sexual asceticism, the notion that women and the temptations of their bodies posed a threat to the spiritual purity of men has remained a popular tenant of Christian gender relations. (“Women and Witches: Patterns of

Analysis on JSTOR”) This was an especially of concern to Puritan ministers who believed that the communities grace with God depended on the moral commitment of both men and women to uphold Christian sexual standards of monogamy within a heterosexual marriage with the wife subservient to the husband. (Kennedy 2015) When famine or illness would fall upon Puritan communities, sexual immorality would often be blamed for having brought on the wrath of God. (“Women and Witches: Patterns of Analysis on JSTOR”) As the people standing in between the man and the corruptive powers of female sexuality, the onus of gatekeeping temptation and sexual immorality fell on the backs of women. Furthermore, because the only evidence sexual indiscretions had occurred besides first-person witness was pregnancy and childbirth, women’s bodies themselves were used as proof of their own sexual immorality in trials against them regardless of whether the sexual experience leading to conception was consensual. (Romeo, E. C. K. 2017)A leading proponent of this rhetoric was Boston preacher, and a distant relative of mine Cotton Mather who wrote in his book *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*,

There is a nakedness of the skin, which is also, and as much, to be accounted criminal. The face is to be naked because of what is to be Known by it; the Hands are to be Naked, because of what is to be Done by them. But for the Nakedness of the Back and Breasts, No Reason can be given; unless it be that a Woman may by showing a Fair-Skin Enkindle a Foul Fire in the Male spectators. (Ornaments 2022)

The emphasis on women’s modesty is a concept that remains relevant in today’s tradition of American Evangelicalism as a cornerstone of Purity culture teachings. Purity culture is defined as the set of teachings not exclusive to, but predominant in American Protestantism, that

mandates that both young women and men abstain from sex until marriage. Another important term to this paper is Evangelicalism, which is a type of Protestant Christianity focused on spreading the message of rebirth through Jesus Christ worldwide. This paper will seek to investigate how messages about female modesty from Evangelical purity culture become embedded in conversations regarding culpability and rape. The main argument in this paper will be that sexual purity and modesty standards for women within the Christian worldview operates as a medium for the surveillance and punishment of errant women as a means of upholding patriarchy.

The first part of this essay will explore the way white Protestants, confronted for the first time with Black and Indigenous people in the New England colonies sought to define their dress, and by extension their identities, in direct opposition to what they perceived to be a 'nakedness' that was critically not white. The second part of the paper will explore how Puritan ministers like my ancestor, Cotton Mather, crafted his sermons and subsequent books to stir moral panic regarding what he saw as the burgeoning 'lewdness' of the anglo-American women, and how women's proclivity for dancing, makeup, and fashionable dress might stir enough sexual immorality to set God's wrath on the Puritan people. The third part of the paper will delve into the way sexual immorality was dealt with in the American court; first conceived within the community through institutions like respectability and reputation, then through fornication and concealment trials which predominantly sent women to the gallows to serve as entertainment while her neighbors and accused rapists pleased in her death. The final part will discuss how Cotton Mather's granddaughter, Hannah Mather Crocker responded to her forefathers assertion that the female body was a template of 'uncleanness,' by illustrating through her play *The*

Midnight Beau, that the true root of immorality in the colonies was drunken men who wreak havoc on the bodies and reputations of women.

A Foreign Nakedness

The Puritans believed they were embarking on a leaving Egypt journey where God would provide them their provincial land. They thought themselves as the chosen people of God who were coming as a blessing to the Black and Indigenous people they were enslaving because they brought with them news of God's salvation. (Castro, W. 2008) Cotton Mather described Black people as inferior to excuse enslaving them as a way to "convert them to Christianity." Mather believed in the popular Enlightenment concept propelled by John Locke of "Tabula Rosa" which claimed that people are born blank slates until ideas make impressions upon them. (Kennedy R. 2015) Mather reasoned that Black and Indigenous people beneath their skin must have "white souls" that can be reached through instruction by white Christians. (Kennedy R. 2015) This construction of white protestant identity as the standard to which other groups of people could aspire to seemed to imbue the puritans with the divine sanctioned task of instructing others in their own way of living. This assumed that Black and Indigenous people should thus receive the Puritans they were encountered with with unconditional gratitude because no matter the land, labor, or bodies taken through rape or murder, the Puritans thought themselves as giving other groups of people the greatest gift of knowledge of God and salvation.

Clothing thus became an important marker of Puritan identity because for the first time they were confronted with the Black and Indigenous people they wished to define themselves against. What dually horrified and fascinated the arriving White Colonists was what the arrivers

called the “Nakedness” and seemingly immodest dress of the Indigenous people. (Castro, W. 2008) The Puritans understood this to mean that they had stumbled upon an immature society that had not become aware of their shame, and thus was living in sin not even aware of the sin they were living in. Their “Naked” appearance evidenced in the Puritan mind the amorality and lawlessness that necessitated White intervention and salvation. (Castro, W. 2008) It must be stated that while the Puritan’s perception of the dress of the Indigenous people living in what is now referred to as the New England area today was one of ‘Nakedness,’ this could not be farther from the truth as Indigenous people of the region had a highly developed textile industry and traditions that utilized deerskins, woven hems, and furs. (Mary Ellen Lepionka, 2021) Textile trading between European settlers and Indigenous peoples emerged immediately through a combination of consensual trades but also as bounty taken through raids and battles, and it quickly became common sight to see a European woman donning feathers in her hat or an Indigenous man to wear tailored woven shirts. (Mary Ellen Lepionka, 2021) Regardless of how quickly these fashions exchanged cultural hands, Europeans first perception of Indigenous people as ‘naked’ marked them with an identity of naivete, sexual deviance, and amorality that Puritans were preoccupied with defining themselves against.

While the Puritans claimed they felt a deep responsibility for delivering salvation to Indigenous people, they also felt a deep seated fear of Indigenous people due to violent confrontations and battles that left many European settlements devastated and sent hordes of European settlers retreating to their homelands. (Castro, W. 2008) During this time, many European settlers would be taken as captives and in the process they would often be forcefully derobed of their European clothing and given Indigenous clothing. (Castro, W. 2008) A popular genre that emerged during the late 17th century in the New England colonies was captivity

narratives which were supposedly written from the firsthand experience of those who had been captured and forced into living alongside Indigenous peoples. (Castro, W. 2008) Cotton Mather was a fervent collector of these stories which he used in his sermons to stir fear in his congregants, warning that they would be stripped of all they had and reduced to a shameful naked state akin to the condition of Native people should they stray from the Lord's path. In his 1699 book *Decennium Luctuosum*, or "The sorrowful decade," Mather laments on the traumas suffered by settlers during the King William's War, writing,

When some of our Eastern People have been Pining away under the Fatigues of their Captivity among the Indians, who had Stript them of all they had, Then they cried out, 'Now, Now the Lord is punishing of us, for our Leaving His Ordinances, and removing to a place of no Gospel for larger Accommodations in the World, and Exposing our Children to be bred up like the very Indians, into whose hands we have fallen!
(*Decennium Luctuosum* 2022)

What Mather warned his congregation was the reversal of his interpretation of Lock's famed "Tabula Rosa" idea, that just as Indigenous and Black people could be taken from their 'blank' uncivilized heathen states and through White Protestant education and mentoring through reading God's word, so was it possible too that good Puritans could transform into what Mather saw as a degraded state; divorced from their morality, their humanity, and God Himself. What immediately preceded this process was first the stripping of their European clothing, then the crossroads of the fate that awaited them; either a gruesome and imminent death or the donning of Indigenous dress and subsequent assimilation into Indigenous tribe and identity. In alignment

with the mythos of man's original fall, those most vulnerable to this transformation were women and children, seeing as men were often immediately killed and Eve had proven herself especially vulnerable to devilish persuasion.. (Castro W. L. 2008) These sermons thus set the stage for a moral panic that placed white women, children, and the legacy of Puritanism in danger of having their identity stripped from them. What Mather feared most in his quest of establishing a nation rooted in his principles was that the land and people his father came to conquer, convert, and transform, would conquer and transform his own people.

Women as God's 'Ornaments'

In his *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*, Cotton Mather expressed open admiration towards noted feminist writers and philosophers of the time including Dutch Calvinist intellectual of the time, Anna Maria van Schurman. Inspired from her book, *The Learned Maid*, a seminal feminist text of the time advocating for allowing women to pursue scholarship, he taught his daughters to read hebrew. (Scheik 1998) Protestantism's core tenant that everyone should be taught to read so that they could read and understand God's word themselves without having to go through the medium of a priest or pope created this unique opportunity where educating women became a priority as a means of salvation whereas before the reformation, education in literacy was a privilege predominantly afforded to only upper class boys. (Sheik 1998) Mather's praise of famous feminist authors extends to his female audience an agreement of morals converging on the rather transgressive idea at the time that women had equal intellectual capacities to men that warranted cultivation through education. ather continued in his praises of women for their church attendance writing, "There are more *Women* than *Men*, in the church; and the more *virtuous* they prove, the more worthy will the Church be, to be figured by, *a Woman that fears the Lord.*" (Ornaments 2022) To Mather, while the disproportionate attendance of

women served as testament to their holy desires, church attendance was negligible compared with a woman's adherence to the laws of virtue and display of fear of God. Women therefore bore responsibility in their day to day lives to not only attend church at a greater proportion than men, but also bore the responsibility of representing the church through displays of virtue and fear of God. While virtue and fear of God may seem subjective measures to modern readers, to Mather, these traits could be monitored and evaluated through observation of a woman's outward appearance and her public behaviors.

In concurrence with the crafting of women's reputations at the time, Mather reasoned that a woman's virtue could be read by her abstinence from the 'worldly pleasures' of extravagant or immodest dress, makeup, and dancing; seeing as each of these were thought to stir a proclivity towards sexual immorality. In the book titled *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion* he most often recommended to his majority female congregation, he writes "A *Painted Face* is but a *Painted sign* hung out for advice to strangers, that they shall find Entertainment there. Tis often the *Whores Forhead* which admits *Paint* upon it." (Ornaments, 2022) The 'paint' he refers to was an artificial lightening of the face often made of lead powder, though dangerous for physical reasons, was deemed morally detrimental to a woman's sexual reputation. Mather establishes the claim that a women's dress can operate as a medium through which one can observe and judge the condition of her soul as he claims that women who paint their face might as well paint on a sign saying they are sexually available and promiscuous. Mapping characteristics like dancing, makeup, and fashionable dress that previously would not have been associated with sex or immorality and giving it negative value thus gave permission to the public to openly assume and judge a woman's character and sexual intent by her appearance and non-sexual behaviors.

God's Punishment of Eve, Court Ordered

In the Spring of 1691 Elizabeth Emerson stood in court accused for the death of her two bastard twins. (Romeo, E. C. K. 2017) Five years before she was in the same court following the birth of her daughter. Her neighbors questioned her for her adultery and she answered that “Timothy Swan had raped her but she kept it secret because she thought it would be a disgrace to her.” (Romeo, E. C. K. 2017) Timothy’s father claimed he “never would have gone into that wicked house” and the court believed him. Then, Elizabeth was judged guilty for the crime of fornication and she paid her fines. She would be judged guilty again, and this time she was sent not to her disgraced home, but to the gallows where my great uncle, Cotton Mather waited with a speech at the pulpit. He referenced her “uncleanness” in his speech saying,

You have before your Eyes, a Couple of Malefactors, whose Murderous Uncleanness ... brought upon them, a most miserable Death. May your Hearts now give a profitable Attention unto the Use that should be made of such a dismal Spectacle. (Cotton Mather, Warnings from the Dead)

The fate of the women who stood before Mather’s pulpit was watching their neighbors salivate and rejoice as their bodies were strung up, and their lives were drained from them in one final taking. Puritan ministers relished in the joy and fervor they could gift their congregants, (and egos!) by the transforming of these women from their God-ordained livelihoods to public spectacle in death.

The Puritans operated a highly patriarchal social structure that asserted a woman’s role was subservient to her husband, her household, and God, therefore a woman’s dress was meant to symbolize commitment to this role, or punishments or social ostracization could be dealt.

(Kennedy 2015) While in the mother country of England, both men and women were punished for sumptuary law violations with relatively equal occurrence and severity, the Puritans heightened fear of female sexuality and its corruptive power lead to women being fined, imprisoned, and even publicly executed at a far higher rate than men for the clothing they wore out of turn. (Damned by a Red Paragon Bodice) Prominent Puritan ministers gave sermons that taught that the cause for wars, famine, and other diseases was God's retribution on the colonies for the "haughty women" it possessed. (Damned by a Red Paragon Bodice) It was therefore reasoned that if God was punishing everyone in the colonies for the crimes of a few women, then harsh punishment should be dealt to these women first as a way to catch and correct the mistake before it was brought before God. According to an 1895 article in the New York Herald, in one event 1,638 women were brought before a Northampton Massachusetts court in 1696 to answer for their "wicked apparel." (Damned for a Red Paragon Bodice) While many of the Puritan women had to pay small fines given out for concrete reasons such as "ten shillings for wearing silk," even women in the upper classes who were technically allowed to wear silk could be fined for wearing it "in a flaunting manner." (Damned for a Red Paragon Bodice) Because not even women of the noble class were protected as they once had been in Europe, while Puritan men of all classes seemed to be forgotten when it came to dealing fines and punishments, this solidified in the mind of the Puritan communities the association between a woman's dress and her morality.

Women who consistently breached sumptuary laws were imagined to be violating not just their own piety, but were also seen to be bringing hellfire on their neighbors, and thus social ostracization and even exile was a common punishment for disobedient women. (Damned for a Red Paragon Bodice) This fear and hysteria was brought to a head in the infamous Salem Witch

trials, which were actually only one of many witch trials in the colonies, however because it resulted in twenty five executions in a short amount of time it is often the most remembered. In the court testimonies, examinations, and hearings, clothing is noted as evidence in twenty one percent of the 452 documents at the time. (Damned for a Red Paragon Bodice) The prevalence of clothing being used as evidence of witchcraft means that many people, mostly women, lost their lives solely due to the judgements neighbors made of their attire. Therefore, Puritan women faced severe consequences for daring to step beyond the bounds of 17th century New England sumptuary laws, and they would often be called upon the altar to lay down their personal expression, their sense of self, and even their own lives to satisfy the demands of piety.

Reputation was an important marker of a person's status in 18th century Anglican society, and laid the foundation establishing a person's viability in the job, marriage, and housing markets of the time. (Dabhoiwala, F. 1996) Though in theory, a person's reputation was meant to represent both their moral and social standings, more often than not social capital was predominantly used as a measure of one's reputation. In practice, this meant that those who were already socially valued specifically white, cis, able-bodied men would be socially elevated through the reputation system while people of color, women, and disabled people would experience reputation as a reinforcing and often demoting force against their current social standing. (Dabhoiwala, F. 1996) Gender discrepancies in the frequency and severity of punishments for men and women at the time indicate that gender was the driving factor. (Dabhoiwala, F. 1996) Reputation for men was valued according to a variety of measurable factors including occupation, lineage, wealth, integrity, and finally sexual morality. (Dabhoiwala, F. 1996) Women on the other hand, were measured by a smaller set of determinative factors including sexuality and manners (Dabhoiwala, F. 1996) Puritan towns were constructed with an aim of social regulation in mind with a concept

they referred to as “watchfulness.” A woman’s sexuality through surveillance of a woman’s pregnancies and the births that would hopefully follow was a means of checking the women in the town’s commitment to moral code. Therefore a woman’s body operated as a medium through which the community could observe and judge the moral condition of not only the objectified woman, but in extension, the favor the community had with God.

Commonheld beliefs regarding women’s bodies as unclean and corruptive bled into the Puritan’s conception of rape and sexual assault against women. While rape and sexual assault was regarded as a capital crime in the American colonies, it was seldom, if ever charged in the court of law. (Lindemann 1984) Between the years of 1698 and 1724 there was only one prosecuted rape per decade in the entire Massachusetts colony, with an even lower average for the preceding decades. (Lindemann, 1984) Because it was common held belief at the time that women could not become pregnant following rape, if a woman were to fall pregnant out of wedlock, the moral onus of the adultery would cast shadow on the woman’s reputation alone because regardless of whether the act causing the pregnancy was consensual, the pregnancy signaled the woman as at least complacent in the act. (Lindemann 1984) What often happened was that a woman would suffer rape or sexual assault, would become pregnant and either through miscarriage, early delivery, or actual infanticide and would be called to the courts to answer for their crimes of adultery or concealment. (White 2019) The crime of concealment was explained in a 1624 English statute adopted by the New England colonies that stated,

WHEREAS, many lewd women that have been delivered of bastard children, to avoid shame, and to escape punishment, do secretly bury or conceal the death of their children, and after, if the child be found dead, the said woman do alleged, that the said child was born dead; whereas it falleth out sometimes (although to hardly it to be proved) that the

said child or children were murdered by the said women, their lewd mothers, or by their assent or procurement (from White, 2019)

The crime of concealment as laid out in this law assumes the ‘lewdness’ of the mother alongside the child’s ‘bastard’ born identity. The law itself presupposed the accused woman’s willing participation in the certain crime of adultery, which in turn morally positioned the accused to appear likely for committing the crime of murder. While the law mandated the dead body of a child, in many cases especially those concerning Indigenous, Black, or impoverished women, the body too was assumed to be concealed and accused women were often quickly convicted and sentenced. (White 2019) Thus, fornication and concealment trials provided an opportunity for the valuing of specific bodies; namely those of cis, able bodied, straight men and chaste white women, and the ethnic cleansing of those who were socially othered in Puritan society.

Hannah Mather Crocker - The Granddaughter That Talked Back

Hannah Mather Crocker was born the last daughter of Samuel Mather, former pastor of Boston’s second church and the granddaughter of Cotton Mather, the infamous Boston pastor whom we have already at length discussed. The Mathers had seven children, but by the time Hannah was born in 1762, most of her older siblings were dead. (Reminiscences 2020) Her mother was Hannah Hutchinson Mather who was the great granddaughter of Anne Hutchinson, the woman who was infamously banished from Massachusetts for daring to publicly preach and hold sermons to an audience of both men and women in her home. (Reminiscences 2020) What Hutchinson stood accused of was preaching to men which was against the law for women, but general court banished her on the legal grounds of “traducing the ministers” in 1637. (Reminiscences 2020) Traducing is a word not commonly used today but was an extremely

common phrase at Hutchinson's time that meant "speaking lies to damage a person's reputation." In front of the Boston Church Congregation, Hutchinson refused to recant her innocence and was in turn excommunicated. In Mather Crocker's writings, she sympathizes with her ancestor on her mother's side writing that she was a good woman with a noble mission but alas she lived in 'the time of persecution' as she called it. (Reminiscences 2020) Hannah Mather Crocker used the education afforded by her privileged upbringing as descendant of Boston's highly esteemed Mather lineage to advocate for a number of issues including women's education, abolition, and much like her Puritan forefathers, the moral condition of the burgeoning American nation. (Reminiscences 2020) She was an avid reader, as encouraged by her protestant upbringing and her tutelage under the famed Benjamin Franklin. (Reminiscences 2020) Using a diminutive and unassuming tone by beginning her more offensive works with sentences like in her seminal feminist text *Observations*, which opens with "THIS little work is not written with a design of promoting any altercation or dispute respecting inferiority or superiority of the sexes." (Crocker 1818) Through the cloaking of her writing in dispersed claims of humility and invocations for women to adopt traditionally feminine activities like sewing and homemaking, she was able to embed her more transgressive claims without raising much attention from her opposition. (Shorb 2011) Through her innocuous and pious image, Hannah Mather Crocker crafted feminist arguments that directly opposed the conclusion of her Puritan forefather's by claiming the increased suffering and subjugation of woman under man was no longer divinely sanctioned in the new world that promised salvation to women especially.

Hannah Mather Crocker's play *The Midnight Beau* criticizes the popularity of the growing movement of Freemasonry which were all male fraternities that many of America's founding fathers including George Washington and Benjamin Franklin were leaders in. Though

the lodges advertised themselves as spreading Enlightenment ideals of personal study, moral discipline, self-improvement, and philanthropy, Mather's play paints a different picture of Freemasonry as a place where the young generation of American men would fall into habits of drunkenness, rape, and other debaucheries. The first scene is set in a hotel with cigars, glasses, and bottles littered across the table with the freemasons drunkenly planning the remainder of their night. One of the characters asks of the other men,

Pray Glee, what murders shall we set about first? Shall we attack cats, rats, or rather rob some old woman's hen roost? What can we make this night our prey? Shall we rove about and make some timid hare the chase? A female chase might suit your taste, and them attack and murder reputation. (Crocker 1818)

By setting the scene with drinking and talks of murder Mather paints an unsympathetic image of Freemason men as imbued with ill intention and a far cry from the virtues of honor, scholarship, and philanthropy they are meant to represent. The men in this scene are depicted rather as dangerous predators who threaten the peace and livelihood of the community of animals, women, and elders they are charged with protecting. Setting the freemason's inventions to rape women before a female character was even presented negates the popular assumption at the time that women and their immoral dress or manners that provokes sexual violence because the men produced this idea organically without provocation.

The men then set off and come upon the quarters of man they seem familiar with named Philanthropus, who is hanging out with a woman named Angelica. Upon entering they declare

their intent to storm the man's quarters and Angelica in turn begs of the men, "I hope you don't intend on taking me by storm, as I resign on no conditions but those of the highest terms of honour. Then on my terms will I capitulate for peace and those only." This line is composed of two clauses that diverge in meaning. The first "I hope you don't intend on taking me by storm" lays out Angelica's assumption from the interaction that the men intend to take her presumably sexually. The next clause saying she resigns on no conditions but those of the highest terms of honor is convoluted because by first saying she resigns implies that she objects to their intention to take her due to her sense of honor. However, her next sentence saying she will "capitulate," or surrender, for peace on her own terms acknowledges her perception that whether or not she objects to being 'taken' by these men, they will do what they choose regardless. In her response to the intruding men, Angelica dually maintains her honor by turning down sex, while acknowledging that the choice and onus of the morality of this decision is not her own, but the men who surround her. To Angelica's surprise, the young man named Stirpling complies with her request, imploring, "You must perceive we are all very high, but I hope we shall not be guilty of any impropriety that may wound your feelings for I would readily sacrifice my life to ingratiate myself with your sex." Caught off guard by this, Angelica in turn praises the young man for his 'unfashionable' respect for women. She goes on to call the man a "rara avis" or rare bird and comments on how surprising this sentiment is given how often women's trust in men is taken advantage of and how too often men's infractions leave women alone with their unhappiness and newfound social disgrace. In a monologue Angelica proclaims

Oh wretched, how much despised is an abandoned woman. Tho' greatly to be pity'd I fear their fall is often from placing too much confidence in your sex, who first gain their

affections, then ruin and destroy their reputations. The too credulous fair one finds too late herself lost to virtue, her peace destroyed, her happiness fled her. And she seeks in dissipation some refuge till lost to every sense of shame she becomes a disgrace to that very sex of which she might have shone one of the brightest ornaments, had it not been for you, oh faithless, deceiving man. (Crocker 1818)

Angelica's monologue mirrors Mather Crocker's argument in *Observations*, that it is to woman's mortal and moral detriment that they choose to place their trust whom they are told will cherish and protect them. This subverts Cotton Mather's claim of the corruptive power of woman by arguing instead that the male sex poses greater threat to women than vice versa. Mather Crocker understands that the mechanism of a woman's downfall is the soiling of her reputation by abandonment following what is implied to be sexual intercourse. By staking women as the people who suffer most from a sexual encounter, Mather Crocker questions the root of a woman's fallen reputation as not her own doing but the doing of the men who abandon her and those who impose their own assumptions onto her.

Angelica's lamentation is steeped with allusions referencing theological texts including the fall of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis and her grandfather Cotton Mather's text, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*, both of which are heavily commented on in Hannah Mather's seminal text *Observations on the Real Rights of Women*. In *Observations*, the crux of Mather's thesis relies on her claim that in God's punishment of humanity for their transgression in eating from the tree of knowledge that Eve received the greater punishment, because not only was she given punishment of pain through childbirth, but also "She was reduced, from a state of honorable equality, to the mortifying state of subjection." She goes on to stake the possibly heretical claim that God's punishment of Eve was unfair when compared with Adam's,

especially considering Adam, being the garden's first occupant, would have heard God's order to not eat of the tree first person and was thus responsible in passing the message onto Eve. Likely influenced by Milton's depiction of a fumbling Adam in *Paradise Lost*, Mather Crocker goes on to reason that "perhaps Adam communicated it to her as an injunction of the Maker, but possibly with such mildness and indifference, that she was not fully impressed with the importance of the command." Mather Crocker establishes in her *Observations* an air of doubt in the abilities of the first man whose incompetence she thought caused and embodied woman's first subjugation. In her response, the character Angelica compares the story of the fall of Eve from honorable and equal status in Genesis to a sexually violated woman who is removed from her honorable reputation in the social realm to one of destitution. Furthermore, while in Cotton Mather's *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*, women are posed dually as potential 'ornaments' whose shine will reflect on the men they are paired to, or as dangerous harlots who pose threat to a man's sanctity and honor, Hannah Mather Crocker stakes the claim that in general, women are made victims to men who threaten their bodily autonomy, reputation, and livelihood.

Hannah Mather Crocker alludes to the homosexuality of the man who agrees not to sexually violate Angelica, which was a common trope affiliated with the Freemasons with many accusing their preference for the company of men to be rooted in homosexuality. The man alongside Angelica agrees to return Stripling to his mother's home per Stripling's request that Philanthropus "Go home with me and pass the morning for the night is far from spent." When Philanthropus brings Stripling to Stripling's mother's home instead of complying with his demands, Stripling protests, "Why you told me a damn lie, you Christian sinner, for you promised to lay with me." It may be the case that Mather Crocker was citing the man's homosexuality as a symptom of his immorality, as 'buggery,' or the sin of having a sexual

relationship with a person of the same gender was looked down on in Puritan New England because it often meant that a man would ‘degrade’ their superior form to take on the role of a woman. I think it is also possible that what Hannah Mather Crocker hopes to convey by alluding to Stripling’s homosexuality, is that the only way a woman could be guaranteed safety in a situation where she is surrounded by drunken men is if the men simply prefer other men. Angelica’s calling Stripling a “rara avis,” or rare bird affirms this idea because the thought of a straight man turning down the opportunity to take sex from her given the situation appears preposterous unless the man’s sexual intent is not on her. Therefore, while it is possible Mather Crocker was referencing Stripling’s homosexuality as evidence of his immorality, it might also have served as a humorous plot twist designed to subvert the audience’s expectations of the situation, allowing Angelica to escape an otherwise certain fate of rape.

Throughout the play’s remainder, Hannah Mather Crocker continues to uphold women as survivors against attacks on their bodies and characters, but also likens the mother figure to God as she being the moral compass of the household, receives her wayward son. As Philanthropus delivers Stripling to his mother, Prudencia, he says to her, “I once more commit your returning prodigal.” The prodigal son is one of Jesus’s parables that describe a father with two sons, one who squanders the wealth given to him, the prodigal son, and one who wisely invests it. Expecting to be scorned and turned away, he is surprised when he is welcomed back to his father’s house with celebration and open arms. The father in this story is representative of God and his entirely loving and forgiving posture towards humankind. (*The Prodigal Son in Sixteenth and Seventeenth-Century Netherlandish Art: Depictions of the Parable and the Evolution of a Catholic Image on JSTOR*, 2022) By describing the son to the mother as ‘your prodigal’ Philanthropus metaphorically places Stripling in the role of the prodigal son, or humanity as a

whole, and Prudencia in the role of the father, or God itself. While the story could have easily maintained the original parables gender prescriptions, the choice to assign God's character to the mother figure is transgressive to the masculine pronouns most often applied to God at the time as well as to the idea that the female body being more corruptible to the Devil's persuasion. This assignment of higher morality to the woman continues throughout the story as shown by the father's appearance who complies with his son's command to bring him beer. The father is thus displayed as an enabler of his son's follies in his willingness to exacerbate his drunkenness. Mather Crocker as an early proponent of the early feminist movements of temperance would have seen alcohol as a harbinger of immorality in young men, much like how Cotton Mather viewed dance, makeup, and fashionable dress to bring out lewdness in women. (Botting & Houser, 2006) Therefore, Mather Crocker boldly questions the efficacy of Puritan patriarchy by positioning the mother figure, and by extension women as a whole, akin to deity as the moral compass to which her son should aspire to.

By posing the young men as communal threat, explaining men's abandonment and respectability politics as the central cause of woman's suffering, and centering the mother as the Godlike figure, Hannah Mather Crocker's *The Midnight Beau* refutes her grandfather Cotton Mather's thesis in *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*, by claiming that instead of young women and their fashion being the root of American moral decay, young men who drink to drunkenness and violently terrorize the bodies and livelihoods of women.

Conclusion

Inspired by the fear of Indigenous people and their ability to transform Protestants into a 'naked' state removed from their Godly providence and salvation, Puritan ministers weaponized

their congregation's anxieties to fuel further violence against their own who transgressed their strict social and moral expectations. Through Cotton Mather's sexualization and demonization of innocuous frivolities such as women's dancing, dress, and makeup, the hysteria for a moral panic regarding women's appearance and sexuality was brewing. What followed was a series of theatrics where Cotton Mather could take God's place in the book of Genesis as the punisher of an errant Eve. What awaited these women was not the punishment of pain through childbirth, nor subjugation to man, both of which had already been endured, but a banishing from life itself, as the men who took all they had; first their bodies, then their reputations, could relish in one final taking as they were reduced from their God-given livelihood to unclean carcass.

While history has cemented my male ancestor's perspectives in the American consciousness, Hannah Mather Crocker's writing, though concealed in niche obscurity, offers needed rest and restoration for the daughters of this legacy. After being instructed within conservative religious settings that justify God's more severe punishments and subjugation of Eve, Mather Crocker's book was the first place I encountered the notion that women do not deserve the violent punishments dealt by an abusive father. After November, I was sent into not only a crisis of family, but also of faith. How could I believe in a God that punished women by turning their own bodies against them, their own partners rulers over them? What I learned was Eve's subjugation of Adam was never meant to be sustained, that through Jesus, women were restored to an exalted state. I hope the other daughters of this legacy may finally hear this good news.

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Symposium Paper

Today I will be talking about my great to the tenth uncle once removed, the infamous Puritan reverend Cotton Mather. In his book, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion* he posed the thesis that women's immodest dress, makeup, and 'lewdness' threatened to corrupt the moral framework of the American colonies and without punishment would go on to destroy the Puritan nation he worked to create. While Cotton railed against women's pride in their appearance he cherished his powdered wigs and when criticized for his own immodesty answered there was no reason to criticize 'an innocent fashion.' I know these ideas are not historical artifacts because I have read the Supreme Court's recent draft to overturn *Roe. Vs. Wade* and I have seen my own father corroborate and use these ideas to violently punish the women in my family. Cotton Mather's legacy thankfully did not end with him, as he had a granddaughter, Hannah Mather Crocker, often cited as the first colonial American feminist author for her text *Observations on the Real Rights of Women* who argued that it is not young women, but men who threaten women's bodies, reputations, and livelihoods that pose the greatest danger to the American moral conscious.

Through Cotton Mather's sexualization and demonization of innocuous frivolities such as women's dancing, dress, and makeup, the hysteria fueling a moral panic regarding women's appearance and sexuality was brewing in 17th century colonial America. In the book titled *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion* which he often recommended to his majority female congregation, he writes "A *Painted Face* is but a *Painted sign* hung out for advice to strangers, that they shall find Entertainment there. Tis often the *Whores Forhead* which admits *Paint* upon it." (*Ornaments*, 2022) The 'paint' he refers to was an artificial lightening of the face often made

of lead powder, though dangerous for physical reasons, was deemed morally detrimental to a woman's sexual reputation. Mather establishes the claim that a woman's appearance can operate as a medium through which one can observe and judge the condition of her soul as he claims that women who paint their face might as well paint on a sign saying they are sexually available and promiscuous. Mapping characteristics like dancing, makeup, and fashionable dress that previously would not have been associated with sex or immorality and giving it negative value thus gave permission to the public to openly assume and judge a woman's character and sexual intent by her appearance and non-sexual behaviors.

In the Spring of 1691 Elizabeth Emerson stood in court accused for the presumed murder of her two bastard twin infants. (Romeo, E. C. K. 2017) Five years before she was in the same court following the birth of her daughter. Her neighbors questioned her for her adultery and she answered that "Timothy Swan had raped her but she kept it secret because she thought it would be a disgrace to her." (Romeo, E. C. K. 2017) Timothy's father claimed he "never would have gone into that wicked house" and the court believed him. Then, Elizabeth was judged guilty for the crime of fornication and she paid her fines. She would be judged guilty again, and this time she was sent not to her disgraced home, but to the gallows where my great uncle, Cotton Mather waited with a speech at the pulpit. He referenced her "uncleanness" in his speech saying,

You have before your Eyes, a Couple of Malefactors, whose Murderous Uncleanness ... brought upon them, a most miserable Death. May your Hearts now give a profitable Attention unto the Use that should be made of such a dismal Spectacle. (Cotton Mather, Warnings from the Dead)

In one event 1,638 women were brought before a Northampton Massachusetts court in 1696 to answer for their "wicked apparel." (Damned for a Red Paragon Bodice) In the court

testimonies, examinations, and hearings of the Salem Witch Trials, clothing is noted as evidence in twenty one percent of the 452 documents at the time. (Damned for a Red Paragon Bodice)

In contrast, while rape and sexual assault was regarded as a capital crime in the American colonies, it was seldom, if ever charged in the court of law. (Lindemann 1984) Between the years of 1698 and 1724 there was only one prosecuted rape per decade in the entire Massachusetts colony, with an even lower average for the preceding years. (Lindemann, 1984)

Because it was common held belief at the time that women could not become pregnant following rape, if a woman were to fall pregnant out of wedlock, the moral onus of the adultery would cast shadow on the woman's reputation alone because regardless of whether the act causing the pregnancy was consensual, the pregnancy signaled the woman as at least complacent in the sexual act. (Lindemann 1984) What often happened was that a woman would suffer rape or t, would become pregnant and either through miscarriage, early delivery, or actual infanticide and would be called to the courts to answer for their crimes of adultery or concealment. (White 2019) The crime of concealment was explained in a 1624 English statute adopted by the New England colonies that stated,

WHEREAS, many lewd women that have been delivered of bastard children, to avoid shame, and to escape punishment, do secretly bury or conceal the death of their children, and after, if the child be found dead, the said woman do alleged, that the said child was born dead; whereas it falleth out sometimes (although to hardly it to be proved) that the said child or children were murdered by the said women, their lewd mothers, or by their assent or procurement (from White, 2019)

The crime of concealment as laid out in this law assumes the ‘lewdness’ of the mother alongside the child’s ‘bastard’ born identity. The law itself presupposed the accused woman’s willing participation in the certain crime of adultery, which in turn morally positioned the accused to appear likely for committing the crime of murder. While the law mandated the dead body of a child, in many cases especially those concerning Indigenous, Black, or impoverished women, the body too was assumed to be concealed and accused women were often quickly convicted and sentenced without evidence. (White 2019) Thus, fornication and concealment trials provided an opportunity for the valuing of specific bodies; namely those of cis, able bodied, straight men and chaste white women, and the ethnic cleansing of those who were socially othered in Puritan society.

Hannah Mather Crocker a Revolutionary period feminist author born the last daughter of Samuel Mather, former pastor of Boston’s second church and the granddaughter of Cotton Mather, Her mother was Hannah Hutchinson Mather who was the great granddaughter of Anne Hutchinson, the woman who was banished from Massachusetts for daring to publicly preach and hold sermons to an audience of both men and women in her home. (Reminiscences 2020) In her writing, Mather Crocker used a diminutive and unassuming tone by beginning her more offensive works with sentences like in her seminal feminist text *Observations*, which opens with “THIS little work is not written with a design of promoting any altercation or dispute respecting inferiority or superiority of the sexes.” (Crocker 1818) Through the cloaking of her writing in dispersed claims of humility and invocations for women to adopt traditionally feminine activities like sewing and homemaking, she was able to embed her more transgressive claims without raising much attention from her opposition. (Shorb 2011) Hannah Mather Crocker’s play *The*

Midnight Beau criticizes the popularity of the growing movement of Freemasonry which were all male fraternities that many of America's founding fathers including George Washington and Benjamin Franklin were leaders in. Though the lodges advertised themselves as spreading Enlightenment ideals of personal study, moral discipline, self-improvement, and philanthropy, Mather's play paints a different picture of Freemasonry as a place where the young generation of American men would fall into habits of drunkenness, rape, and other debaucheries. Additionally, choosing the genre of the play is an explicit transgression against her Puritan forefathers who banned the English art of theater for promoting idleness and lewdness. The first scene is set in a hotel with cigars, glasses, and bottles littered across the table with the freemasons drunkenly planning the remainder of their night. One of the characters asks of the other men,

Pray Glee, what murders shall we set about first? Shall we attack cats, rats, or rather rob some old woman's hen roost? What can we make this night our prey? Shall we rove about and make some timid hare the chase? A female chase might suit your taste, and them attack and murder reputation. (Crocker 1818)

By setting the scene with drinking and talks of murder Mather paints an unsympathetic image of Freemason men as imbued with ill intention and a far cry from the virtues of honor, scholarship, and philanthropy they are meant to represent. The men in this scene are depicted rather as dangerous predators who threaten the peace and livelihood of the community of animals, women, and elders they are charged with protecting. Setting the freemason's intentions to rape women before a female character was even presented negates the popular assumption at the time

that women and their immoral dress or manners that provokes sexual violence because the men produced this idea organically without provocation.

The men then set off and come upon the home of a man they seem familiar with named Philanthropus, who is hanging out with a woman named Angelica. Upon entering they declare their intent to storm the man's quarters and Angelica in turn begs of the men, "I hope you don't intend on taking me by storm, as I resign on no conditions but those of the highest terms of honour. Then on my terms will I capitulate for peace and those only." In her response to the intruding men, Angelica dually maintains her honor by turning down sex, while acknowledging that the choice and onus of the morality of this decision is not her own, but the men who surround her. To Angelica's surprise, the young man named Stirpling complies with her request, saying he does not want to offend her honor and asking instead the man who is with her to 'lie with him.' Caught off guard by this, Angelica in turn praises the young man for his 'unfashionable' respect for women. In a monologue Angelica proclaims

Oh wretched, how much despised is an abandoned woman. Tho' greatly to be pity'd I fear their fall is often from placing too much confidence in your sex, who first gain their affections, then ruin and destroy their reputations. The too credulous fair one finds too late herself lost to virtue, her peace destroyed, her happiness fled her. And she seeks in dissipation some refuge till lost to every sense of shame she becomes a disgrace to that very sex of which she might have shone one of the brightest ornaments, had it not been for you, oh faithless, deceiving man. (Crocker 1818)

Angelica's monologue mirrors Mather Crocker's argument in *Observations*, that it is to woman's mortal and moral detriment that they choose to place their trust in men whom they are told will cherish and protect them. This subverts Cotton Mather's claim of the corruptive power of woman by arguing instead that the male sex poses greater threat to women than vice versa. Mather Crocker understands that the mechanism of a woman's downfall is the soiling of her reputation by abandonment following what is implied to be sexual intercourse. By staking women as the people who suffer most from a sexual encounter, Mather Crocker questions the root of a woman's fallen reputation as not her own doing but the doing of the men who abandon her and those who impose their own assumptions onto her.

Angelica's lamentation is steeped with allusions referencing theological texts including the fall of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis and her grandfather Cotton Mather's text, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*. In *Observations*, the crux of Mather Crocker's thesis relies on her claim that in God's punishment of humanity for their transgression in eating from the tree of knowledge that Eve received the greater punishment, because not only was she given punishment of pain through childbirth, but also "She was reduced, from a state of honorable equality, to the mortifying state of subjection." She goes on to stake the possibly heretical claim that God's punishment of Eve was unfair when compared with Adam's, especially considering Adam, being the garden's first occupant, would have heard God's order to not eat of the tree first person and was thus responsible in passing the message onto Eve. Likely influenced by Milton's depiction of a fumbling Adam in *Paradise Lost*, Mather Crocker goes on to reason that "perhaps Adam communicated it to her as an injunction of the Maker, but possibly with such mildness and indifference, that she was not fully impressed with the importance of the command." Mather Crocker establishes in her *Observations* an aire of doubt in the abilities of the first man whose

incompetence she thought caused and embodied woman's first subjugation. In her response, the character Angelica compares the story of the fall of Eve from honorable and equal status in Genesis to a sexually violated woman who is removed from her honorable reputation in the social realm to one of destitution. Her final argument was that woman's subjugation was cleansed restored to the former exalted state by Jesus being delivered to the world through a woman's body, the Virgin Mary. However, because Jesus's salvation of all mankind was so noteworthy, the freeing of woman from a subject state was easily forgotten. Thus, a throughline is established in Hannah Mather Crocker's work that asserts men as the cause of women's downfall not only through physical and sexual violence but also in the Christian Creation myth.

Therefore, while Cotton Mather's legacy of demonizing women for their innocuous appearance and behavior is still rooted in the American consciousness, the words of his granddaughter Hannah Mather Crocker offer justice and retribution to the women he murdered, telling them the assaults they suffered are not any fault or moral decay of their own, but the men who perpetuated this violence in the first place.