# The Coquette

## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF HANNAH WEBSTER FOSTER

Hannah Webster was born in Salisbury, Massachusetts in 1758. Very little is known about her life, but her father was a wealthy merchant and her mother died in 1762 when Foster was just four years old. She attended boarding school as a child and was well educated. Around 1770, Foster began to write political articles for a Boston newspaper, and she is credited with being the first active and professed feminist in the newly independent America. In 1785, she married Reverend John Foster, a respected preacher, and the couple moved to Brighton, Massachusetts where he took over the service of the local church. They had six children together, and afterward, Foster began to write. She wrote *The Coquette* in 1797, based on the real-life death of Elizabeth Whitman, an unmarried woman who died after giving birth alone at an inn in Danvers, Massachusetts. The scandalous story of Elizabeth Whitman quickly swept the nation and became a popular cautionary tale about the dangers of immorality. Foster published her book anonymously, signed only "A Lady of Massachusetts," but it was an instant success. *The Coquette* continued to be popular for the rest of Foster's life, and reportedly, only the Bible was more widely read in America during the late eighteenth century. In 1798, Foster published her second book, *The Boarding School; or, Lessons of a Preceptress to Her Pupils*, a book on female education in early America, but it was nowhere near as popular as *The Coquette*. Foster's husband died in 1829, at which time she moved to Montreal, Quebec, Canada, to live with her daughter. Foster died there at the age of 81, a respected writer and advocate for women's rights.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*The Coquette* was written in 1797, mere decades after America's independence from Great Britain. The British colonies in America began to revolt against Britain in 1765 with the passing of the Stamp Act, which required all legal documents, calendars, newspapers, and playing cards used in the colonies to be printed on a special stamped paper. The colonists were furious, and they immediately formed the Stamp Act Congress, the first meeting of elected representatives from the colonies, to protest taxation without representation. The American colonies wished to be taxed only by their own elected officials, not by the British Parliament, and resentment over unfair taxation began to spread and escalate. Tension between the colonies and Britain continued to rise, and in 1773, after tea imported from China was unfairly taxed, the colonists again revolted and threw an entire shipment of tea from the East India Company into the Boston Harbor in a protest that has come to be known as the Boston Tea Party. In 1774, the colonists elected their own form of government and were at an all-out war with Britain. By 1776, the Continental Army defeated the British with the help of the French, and on July 2, 1776, King George's rule of the colonies was deemed tyrannical and the colonies were declared a free and independent nation.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* is an epistolary novel, which means it is told through a series of letters. The very first epistolary novel, *Prison of Love*, was written in 1485 by Castilian Spanish writer Diego de San Pedro. This particular form of writing did not reach widespread popularity until 1740, when Englishman Samuel Richardson wrote and published *Pamela; or, Virtue Rewarded*. Richardson followed up his successful novel with the publication of *Clarissa: or, the History of a Young Lady* in 1748, which is widely considered to be one of the greatest British novels of all time. Both *Pamela* and *Clarissa* engage issues of virtue and morality, and Foster even references *Clarissa* in *The Coquette*. The very first novel ever written and published in America was William Hill Brown's epistolary novel, *The Power of Sympathy: or, The Triumph of Nature*, in 1789. Like *The Coquette*, Brown's novel focuses on sexual passion and seduction. Foster's novel also centers on women's rights and autonomy, which is a topic that frequently appears in epistolary works. Other epistolary novels that center on women include Jane Austen's posthumously published *Lady Susan* and, more recently, *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Coquette; or, the History of Eliza Wharton*
- **When Written:** 1797
- **Where Written:** Brighton, Massachusetts
- **When Published:** 1797
- **Literary Period:** Revolutionary/Early American
- **Genre:** Fiction, epistolary novel
- **Setting:** Connecticut and Massachusetts
- **Climax:** When Eliza's mother, Mrs. Wharton, reads a death notice in a Boston newspaper for a woman matching Eliza's description and realizes Eliza has died at an inn in Danvers after giving birth to a child, who has also died.
- **Antagonist:** Peter Sanford
- **Point of View:** first-person (through multiple letters from

various people)

## EXTRA CREDIT

**A First Time for Everything.** *The Coquette* was the first novel written and published by an American born woman, and even though it wasn't published under Foster's name until 1866, it has been popular and widely read since the day it was published in 1797.

**Famous Relatives.** Elizabeth Whitman, the real-life inspiration for Foster's Eliza Wharton, was a distant cousin to Foster's husband, John.

## PLOT SUMMARY

Eliza Wharton's fiancé, Mr. Haly, has recently died. Eliza's hand had been promised to Mr. Haly, a preacher several years her senior, by her late father, and owing to an "implicit obedience to the will and desires of [her] parents," she had agreed to marry him. Mr. Haly fell ill not long after their engagement, and while they never married, Eliza nursed him until his death. She did not love him, but she did grow fond of him, and now she is relieved and happy to be released from her obligation. Eliza is resistant to the oppressive ideals of womanhood in post-Revolutionary America's patriarchal society, and she has no desire to marry or have a family. Eliza is a vivacious and cheerful woman of a "naturally gay disposition," and she has a tendency for coquetry. Eliza views marriage as confining, and she considers it "the tomb of friendship"—this is especially grave to her because friendship is the most important aspect of her life. She wants to socialize and date multiple men and avoid becoming *anyone's* wife for as long as possible.

While visiting her dear friends, the General and Mrs. Richman, Eliza meets two very different men: Reverend Boyer, a respectable and solemn preacher, and Major Sanford, a wealthy and fashionable man—and a confessed libertine and rake. Reverend Boyer is just the type of man society and Eliza's friends expect her to marry. He is honorable and virtuous, but he is also rather boring, and he lives a frugal life. Sanford, on the other hand, is exciting and charismatic, and he is fabulously wealthy. A match with Sanford could secure Eliza a place in the upper class, something she has dreamed of for most of her life. Sanford's reputation, however, leaves much to be desired, and he sees Eliza as nothing more than another potential notch in his belt. Eliza's friends despise Sanford, and they are overly critical and judgmental of Eliza's flirtatious behavior and her obvious attraction to him. Despite Mrs. Richman's constant encouragement to accept Reverend Boyer's advances, Eliza tells her friends and both the men in her life in no uncertain terms that she will not be confined to any man.

As a woman in the late 1700s, Eliza's wishes to remain single are ignored by Boyer and Sanford, and they both vie for her attention. Boyer begins to fall in love with her, and constantly pressures her to get married. Sanford, who (like Eliza) believes marriage to be confining and oppressive, has no desire to marry her. After all, Eliza doesn't have any money, and Sanford has squandered his own fortune. If he ever does get married, it will be to a woman with a substantial fortune who can keep him in the lifestyle he has grown accustomed to.

Even though Sanford has no desire to marry Eliza, he doesn't wish to see her with anyone else, and he vows to sabotage her relationship with Reverend Boyer. Eliza's friends continue to encourage her to marry Boyer—despite her explicit requests for them to stay out of her romantic life—and they openly condemn her attraction to Sanford. Soon, Eliza's friends and their patriarchal society wear her down, and she agrees to marry Boyer, but she refuses to give him a concrete date. Boyer grows tired of waiting for her, and he is increasingly suspicious of her relationship with Sanford. Boyer finally leaves Eliza for good after finding her in the garden, deep in conversation with Sanford.

After Boyer leaves Eliza, he writes her a scathing letter. He writes not as a "lover," he says, but as "a disinterested friend," and like Eliza's friends, he scorns and insults her. He implies that her virtue and morals are lacking, and that her coquettish behavior is beneath his righteous honor. He condemns her relationship with Sanford, and then he goes to Hampshire to take his final vows as a preacher and serve a local church. Eliza is left heartbroken. She had met with Sanford in the garden only to tell him that she planned to marry Boyer and couldn't see him anymore, but Boyer refuses to hear her explanation. Eliza has finally fallen in love with Boyer, but it is too late.

Sanford, too, leaves and heads south, and it is not long before Eliza hears rumors that he is to marry a rich southern woman. Alone without either man, Eliza spirals into a crippling depression, and her health begins to fail. She starts to lose weight and offers vague complaints of fatigue and headaches, and she completely withdraws from social life. Mrs. Richman encourages Eliza to write Boyer for "peace of mind," which she does, hoping to "rekindle the flame" of their prior relationship. Boyer is pleasant, but distant and still judgmental, and he has taken a new and "virtuous" wife.

In the meantime, Eliza's physical and mental health continue to fail, and Sanford moves back to town with his new wife, Nancy. Sanford immediately resumes his friendship with Eliza and encourages her to spend time with his wife. Eliza agrees, and while she briefly seems to lift from her depression, it is not long before she again turns into a "recluse." Eliza's friend, Julia Granby, comes to stay with Eliza in hopes of cheering her up, but Eliza is beyond her help. What's more, Julia too is judgmental and critical of Eliza's relationship with Sanford and her coquettish ways, and she often only makes Eliza feel worse.

Sanford continues to pursue Eliza, doing nothing to hide it from

his wife, and is soon successful in seducing her. She becomes pregnant and manages to conceal it from her friends and family, but then Julia catches her sneaking out in the middle of the night to meet Sanford. She admits the affair and throws herself at Julia's mercy, but Julia is cold and unforgiving. "You have erred against knowledge and reason; against warning and counsel," Julia tells Eliza. "You have forfeited the favor of your friends; and reluctant will be their forgiveness."

With her reputation ruined, Eliza leaves town in the middle of the night. Sanford escorts her to **a roadside inn at Danvers**, a town in northern Massachusetts, and secures her a room. Sanford returns home and never sees Eliza again. Nancy soon divorces Sanford, leaving him homeless and destitute, and Eliza gives birth to a **baby** alone at the inn, who promptly dies. Eliza herself dies not long after, presumably from tuberculosis, having "become a reproach and disgrace to [her]friends."

## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Miss Eliza Wharton** – Mrs. Wharton's daughter, friend to Lucy, Julia, and Mrs. Richman, Reverend Boyer's love interest, and Peter Sanford's mistress. Eliza is a single woman in her middle thirties living in post-Revolutionary America. She is a dedicated and dutiful daughter, and when her late father arranged for her to marry Mr. Haly, a preacher several years her senior, Eliza agreed, due to an "implicit obedience to the will and desires of [her] parents." Sadly, Mr. Haly falls ill, and even though they are not yet married, Eliza tenderly nurses him until he dies. Released from her obligation, she vows to remain single and enjoy her newly found freedom. Eliza is of a naturally "cheerful" and "gay disposition," and she is prone to coquetry, or flirtatious behavior. Eliza is a loyal and devoted friend, and she places value on friendship above all else. She is particularly resistant to the narrow and confining patriarchal ideals of eighteenth-century womanhood, and she is averse to the idea of marriage and the domestic sphere. She considers marriage "the tomb of friendship," and she has no desire to sacrifice her freedom and happiness to devote herself to a man and family. Eliza's friends are particularly critical of her coquettish ways, and they frequently imply that she is lacking virtue and moral fiber because she prefers to date multiple men instead of settling down. Eliza's judgmental friends push her towards the respectable Reverend Boyer and condemn her feelings for the libertine Peter Sanford, but Eliza is torn. She knows she should consent to marry Boyer, and she knows that she probably will, but Sanford's fortune is alluring to Eliza and she dreams of rising in social class and standing. Boyer grows tired of Eliza entertaining both him and Sanford, and it isn't until after Boyer leaves her that Eliza realizes she wants to marry him. Sanford forsakes her too and marries a woman with a fortune, and Eliza is left alone and heartbroken. Her friends continue to lecture and degrade her for being a coquette and she grows increasingly depressed and physically ill. Sanford eventually comes back with his new wife and continues to pursue Eliza, and he finally succeeds in seducing her. He leaves her pregnant and alone at **a roadside inn at Danvers**, where she gives birth to a **baby** that promptly dies. Eliza dies shortly after, as well, presumably from tuberculosis, rejected by her friends and society.

**Major Peter Sanford** – Nancy Sanford's husband, Eliza Wharton's lover, and brief love interest of Miss Laurence. Sanford is a confessed libertine and rake, and he is determined to make Eliza another notch in his womanizing belt. Sanford first meets Eliza when she is vising friends in New Haven, and while he suspects that she is a coquette, Eliza's friendly disposition suits his intentions just fine. Eliza's friends despise Sanford, and they believe he is exceedingly dangerous to Eliza's fragile virtue. Surprisingly, Sanford begins to fall in love with Eliza—as much as he can love any woman—and he is determined to sabotage her relationship with Reverend Boyer, the only man he sees as any real competition. Still, Sanford detests the idea of marriage and doesn't wish to marry Eliza, he just doesn't want to see her with another man. After all, Eliza doesn't have any money, and Sanford has squandered his fortune. He will only consider marrying a woman who can keep him in the lifestyle he is accustomed to. Eliza initially resists Sanford's advances and he soon goes South, where he marries Nancy, a woman with a sizable fortune. Sanford still carries a torch for Eliza, however, and he and Nancy soon move to Eliza's hometown. There, he again gains Eliza's attention and encourages her friendship with his wife, whom he openly treats with contempt. Sanford doesn't bother to hide his feelings for Eliza, and he continues to pursue her despite being married. When Nancy gives birth to Sanford's son and the **baby** dies, Sanford barely bats an eye. He is a despicable and sexist man who condemns Eliza's coquetry while defending his own rakish behavior, and he even refuses to marry Eliza after he seduces her on the grounds that she is obviously seducible and lacking virtue. Sanford helps Eliza run away to **the inn at Danvers** after their affair leaves her pregnant, but he never sees her again, and Eliza gives birth to their child alone. Sadly, their baby dies, and Eliza herself dies shortly after. After Eliza's death, Sanford is ruined in Hartford, and he must sell his house to pay his creditors. He leaves town alone, a broken and dejected man.

**Reverend J. Boyer** – Eliza Wharton's love interest for a short time and friend to Mr. Selby. Reverend Boyer first meets Eliza when she is visiting friends in New Haven, and he quickly becomes enamored with her. Eliza has a reputation of being a good and virtuous woman, and she is equally beautiful. Boyer is immediately drawn to Eliza's "cheerful" and "gay disposition," but he worries she may be a bit of a coquette. This doesn't initially bother Boyer, however, as Eliza's free and easy disposition will nicely augment his rather reserved life as a

preacher. Boyer falls in love with Eliza and endeavors to marry her, but she is increasingly resistant to his advances. Boyer is insecure and frequently reacts with jealousy when Eliza is friendly with other men. She has multiple suitors, and one, a rake named Major Sanford, causes Boyer to become particularly suspicious. Eliza eventually agrees to marry Boyer, but she never does tell him when. He finds Eliza in the garden in close conversation with Sanford and leaves her in a jealous rage, convinced she is partial to Sanford. Boyer writes Eliza a scathing break-up letter in which, as a new and "disinterested friend," he insults and berates her. Like Eliza's other friends, Boyer refuses to hear Eliza's side of the story and is harsh and unyielding in his treatment of her. Eliza tries to get him back, but he moves to Hampshire to take his final vows as a preacher, marries a "virtuous woman," and Eliza never hears from him again.

**Miss Lucy Freeman/Mrs. Lucy Sumner** – Eliza Wharton's closest friend and Mr. Sumner's wife. Lucy and Eliza grew up near each other in Harford, Connecticut, and they have been friends for years. Eliza writes Lucy far more than anyone else in *The Coquette*, and Eliza is constantly seeking her friend's advice. Lucy is the epitome of eighteenth-century womanhood and virtue. She is described as "modest" and "discreet," and she is the example that Eliza and their shared friend, Julia Granby, follow. Lucy marries Mr. Sumner near the middle of the novel, and they enjoy a happy marriage, which Foster implies is largely due to their similar tastes and social standing. Like Eliza's other friends, Lucy is overly critical of Eliza's coquettish behavior, and she frequently suggests that Eliza is lacking in virtue and morals because of her relationship with Major Sanford, a known rake and womanizer. Julia brags to Eliza that Lucy once rejected a rake before she was married to Mr. Sumner because a rake can never be reformed, and to consort with a rake in any way is to sacrifice one's virtue. Lucy frequently lectures Eliza about her reputation, and she believes that chastity and virtue are one and the same. Lucy is so quick to condemn Eliza for not conforming to her narrow view of virtue, however, that she forgets that being virtuous, or moral and righteous, also includes being kind and tolerant.

**Miss Julia Granby** – Eliza Wharton's friend. Julia is a single woman, but unlike Eliza, she is looking forward to marriage and domestic life. She is beautiful and highly virtuous, and, according to Major Sanford, completely incapable of being seduced. The "dignity of her manners forbid all assaults upon her virtue," Sanford says, and Julia is constantly urging Eliza to cease her coquettish ways. Like Eliza's other friends, Julia is highly judgmental of Eliza's flirtatious behavior, and she is often overly harsh and critical in her approach. Julia's intolerance of Eliza's relationship with Sanford is in large part why Eliza flees to Danvers after she becomes pregnant with Sanford's illegitimate **baby**. Even after Julia learns of Eliza's death at **the inn at Danvers**, she is still highly critical of Eliza and appears more sympathetic toward Mrs. Wharton than Eliza. While Julia certainly mourns the loss of her friend, she mourns Eliza's lost virtue even more. "Not only the life, but what was still dearer," Julia says, "the reputation and virtue of the unfortunate Eliza, have fallen victims at the shrine of libertinism!" Despite being a dear friend to Eliza, Julia is more concerned with Eliza's reputation and virtue than she is with Eliza's happiness and well-being.

**Mrs. Richman** – Eliza Wharton's cousin and dear friend, and the wife of General Richman. The General and Mrs. Richman "are the picture of conjugal felicity," and Eliza frequently visits their happy home in New Haven. Mrs. Richman's blissful marriage is the example Eliza is expected to emulate, and she constantly pushes Eliza to follow in her footsteps. Mrs. Richman is wholly dedicated to the domestic sphere and claims that "all [her] happiness is centered within the limits of [her] own walls"—meaning her marriage and family are all she needs to be happy. She tells Eliza that "conjugal and maternal love are the main springs of [her] life," and she disapproves of Eliza's desire to avoid marriage and casually date instead. Mrs. Richman uses her friendship with Eliza to openly criticize her and her choices, and she frequently lectures Eliza about her relationship with Major Sanford, a self-professed libertine and rake. Mrs. Richman is overly judgmental of Eliza and implies that her flirtatious behavior is a mark upon her virtue and morality. Instead of supporting Eliza's choice not to submit to the oppressive confines of eighteenth-century ideals of womanhood, Mrs. Richman's intolerance exacerbates Eliza's misery and leads to her subsequent alienation. Foster insinuates that Mrs. Richman is pregnant early in the novel, and she indeed gives birth to a **baby** girl, who sadly dies. After the death of Mrs. Richman's infant daughter, she is obviously heartbroken, and it is through this sadness that Foster suggests even the happiest and most successful marriages are susceptible to despair.

**Mrs. M. Wharton** – Eliza Wharton's mother. Mrs. Wharton is the epitome of a proper eighteenth-century woman; she is a devoted mother to her children, whom she constantly dotes on, and she is fiercely proud of her place in the domestic sphere. Mrs. Wharton has recently been widowed, but she was likewise devoted to her husband, who Foster hints was also a preacher. After Eliza becomes pregnant with Sanford's illegitimate **baby**, she is too ashamed to tell her mother. Eliza hides her condition and confesses in a letter, but not before she throws herself at Mrs. Wharton's feet and begs forgiveness for being a "wretch." She easily grants Eliza forgiveness and professes her eternal love. Mrs. Wharton is devastated when Eliza runs off and leaves town in the middle of the night, and she is the first to read in a Boston newspaper that a woman matching Eliza's description has died after giving birth at an **inn at Danvers**.

**Mr. T. Selby** – The Reverend J. Boyer's closest friend. Selby and Boyer frequently correspond about Boyer's relationship with

Eliza Wharton, and Boyer sends Selby in person to deliver a letter to her. Selby is offended by Eliza's free and outgoing behavior, and he is suspicious of her friendship with Major Sanford. Selby thinks that Eliza is a coquette, or a promiscuous flirt, and he is vocal about these concerns to Reverend Boyer.

**Mrs. Nancy Sanford** – Major Peter Sanford's wife and, for a short time, Eliza Wharton's friend. Nancy comes from a wealthy Southern family, and Sanford marries her for her money so he can retain his class status. Sanford has squandered his own wealth, and marrying a rich woman is, in his opinion, the only solution. However, Sanford treats Nancy and their marriage with indifference and doesn't bother to hide his feelings for Eliza. Nancy befriends Eliza at the behest of her husband—Sanford's plan to keep Eliza close—and her marriage is generally unhappy. Sanford openly admits that he does not love Nancy and he speaks of her with contempt. She gives birth to his son, but the **baby** dies soon after birth. Once Eliza also becomes pregnant with Sanford's baby, Nancy divorces Sanford and takes her money with her, leaving him destitute. Nancy and her marriage to Sanford serve as a cautionary tale for those who marry for the sake of money and social class.

**Mr. Haly** – Eliza Wharton's former fiancé. Mr. Haly's engagement to Eliza was arranged by Eliza's deceased father, who was particularly fond of Haly. Not much is known about him, although it is implied that he was also a preacher like the Reverend Boyer. Haly was a middle-class man of respectable merit, and he took sick not long after becoming engaged to Eliza. She nursed him until his death, and while Eliza did not love him, she did grow to respect and esteem him. To Eliza, Mr. Haly represents the confinements of her patriarchal society. Even though she did not love him, she was still expected to marry him and devote her life to him.

**Miss Laurence** – Mr. Laurence and Mrs. Laurence's daughter, friend to the General and Mrs. Richman, and fleeting love interest of Peter Sanford. Miss Laurence comes from a wealthy family, and Sanford sees her fortune as a way to retain his social status after he wastes all his own money. Both Sanford and Eliza comment that Miss Laurence has no "soul," which is to say she is boring and cold. Sanford is only interested in Miss Laurence until he finds a woman with more money, and then he promptly drops her, and she is never mentioned again. The character of Miss Laurence highlights how women aren't valued in eighteenth-century America. Sanford views Miss Laurence, and all other women, as disposable—when he doesn't need her anymore, he throws her away.

**General Richman** – Mrs. Richman's husband and Eliza Wharton's friend. General Richman is the personification of wealth and high social standing, and his name confirms that he is indeed a rich man. The General's marriage to Mrs. Richman is happy and successful, and it is the golden standard Eliza is expected to follow.

**Mrs. Laurence** – The wife of Mr. Laurence and mother to Miss Laurence. Mrs. Laurence is a wealthy woman of high social standing, and she frequently visit the General and Mrs. Richman with her family. Mrs. Laurence supports patriarchal ideals of womanhood and believes that discussions about politics and issues of the nation are best left to men.

**Mr. Sumner** – Lucy's husband. Lucy and Mr. Sumner are married near the middle of the book, but very little is ever said about him except that he and Lucy are "a charming couple" and exceedingly happy due to a "similarity of tastes" and "consonance of their dispositions." Through Mr. Sumner's happy and successful marriage to Lucy, Foster seems to imply that marriage is most successful when between two people of similar personality and social class.

**Mr. Laurence** – Mrs. Laurence's husband and Miss Laurence's father. Mr. Laurence is a wealthy man, and he is of the upper class. He frequently visits the General and Mrs. Richman. He briefly considers Major Sanford, a man of style and wealth who is secretly broke, as a potential husband for his daughter.

### MINOR CHARACTERS

**Mr. Charles Deighton** – Peter Sanford's friend. Sanford writes several letters to Charles, whom he describes as a dear friend, but Charles never writes to Sanford. This one-sided correspondence suggests that Charles is not as close a friend as Sanford imagines or would like.

## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

### WOMEN AND SOCIETY

Hannah Webster Foster's epistolary novel, *The Coquette*, focuses on Eliza Wharton, a middle-class woman from Connecticut, as she navigates the patriarchal society of eighteenth-century America. The novel takes place in 1797, mere decades after America's independence from Britain, but the role of women in the new nation has not been similarly liberated. Women have very little control over their fate and are typically confined to the domestic sphere, where they are valued for their role as wives and mothers. Nearly all the women in *The Coquette* fit this standard of womanhood, but Eliza grows resistant to this inevitable role and tries, in vain, to live a life of her own choosing. Eliza's resistance leads to her eventual undoing, and her tragic death serves as a cautionary tale for women who step outside the predetermined path for women. However,

through the portrayal of women and traditional gender roles in the late 1700s, Foster highlights the oppressive and patriarchal nature of early American society and advocates for increased freedom and autonomy for women in the new republic.

The ideal post-Revolutionary American woman is plainly established in the letters of Eliza's suitors, which illustrate what men, and therefore broader society, expect from women: selflessness, poise, and graciousness. Reverend Boyer, one of two men who vie for Eliza's romantic attention, initially describes Eliza as "a young lady whose elegant person, accomplished mind, and polished manner have been much celebrated." Eliza is attractive and educated, and her "celebrated" and "polished manner" is a reference to the attention she gave Mr. Haly, the first man she was arranged to marry, during his illness and death. Eliza's dedication and servitude make her the ideal woman in Boyer's—and greater society's—opinion. Clearly, Eliza's engagement to Mr. Haly was not of her own choosing, but she nevertheless committed to him and dutifully behaved as an ideal woman should. Eliza is pursued by a second man, Peter Sanford, who describes her as "a young lady whose agreeable person, polished manners, and refined talents have rendered her the toast of the country." Sanford's description of Eliza is nearly identical to Boyer's, and it also portrays her as a shining example of eighteenth-century womanhood, which hinges on impossibly high standards of beauty and sophistication and being "agreeable" to the service of men and family.

Just as Eliza initially conforms to the standards of ideal womanhood, the women in her life are likewise the picture of dedication and obedience. Eliza's own mother, Mrs. Wharton, has been recently widowed, but her devotion to her children has "roused [her] from the lethargy of grief." She finds solace in attending to her children's "education and interests" and has, in turn, been "rewarded by their proficiency and duty." As a woman, it is expected that Mrs. Wharton's primary responsibility is to her family, even when facing her own emotions after the death of a spouse. After Eliza's dearest friend, Lucy, is married to Mr. Sumner, Eliza relays the news to their shared friend, Julia Granby. Julia responds: "I am both pleased and instructed by the conduct of this amiable woman. As I always endeavored to imitate her discreet and modest behavior in a single state," Julia continues, "so likewise shall I take her for a pattern should I ever enter a married life." Like Eliza, Julia is not yet married, but views the "discreet and modest behavior" of Lucy and her marriage to Mr. Sumner as the standard of female behavior in society.

However, Eliza begins to resist the strict gender roles of early American society, which underscores her own desire for increased freedom and autonomy, as well as the oppression of women within the broader context of their patriarchal society. After Mr. Haly's death, Eliza desires the "opportunity, unbiased by opinion, to gratify [her] natural disposition in a participation of those pleasures which youth and innocence afford." In other words, now that Mr. Haly is dead, Eliza wants to have fun and date multiple men before settling down with a husband and family. Eliza is young and beautiful, and she wants the freedom to enjoy it. Of course, patriarchal society does not permit Eliza to behave this way, and her attempts to do so are met with scorn and criticism.

As Eliza vacillates between the respected Reverend Boyer and the libertine Peter Sanford, she becomes "besieged" by her own desires and society's conflicting expectations. "Sometimes I think of becoming a predestinarian, and submitting implicitly to fate, without any exercise of free will," Eliza says, "but, as mine seems to be a wayward one, I would counteract the operations of it, if possible." Eliza knows that she is expected to marry a man like Boyer and be a devoted and boring wife, regardless of her personal preferences and feelings, but she longs for the choice to behave otherwise. The romantic advances of Major Sanford offer Eliza the opportunity to act on these desires and exercise some "free will." Of course, Eliza doesn't possess "free will" in the true sense of the word, and her tragic death is evidence of this. After Eliza's actions leave her pregnant and unmarried, she banishes herself from society. Her resistance to traditional notions of womanhood have left her a public disgrace, and she ultimately dies alone after giving birth to a stillborn child. While Eliza's choices undoubtedly lead to her demise, Foster also suggests that Eliza is at the mercy of a rigid and unforgiving patriarchal society, which has a heavy hand in guiding her actions. Through Eliza's death—and that of her **baby**—Foster implies that patriarchal ideals are both unjust and dangerous, and it is in this way that she argues for increased freedom and autonomy for women in the new nation.

## SEX AND VIRTUE

At the center of post-Revolutionary American social fabric is the importance of virtue, or high moral standing and righteousness, which is tantamount to modesty and chastity. "Virtue in the common acceptation of the term," the Reverend Boyer maintains, "is confined to that particular, you know." Indeed, as protagonist Eliza Wharton entertains the attention of various men, her image of modesty and chastity is tarnished, and her virtue is likewise lost in the eyes of society. The mere allegation of promiscuity is enough to ruin Eliza's reputation and render her morally bankrupt; however, Foster suggests that it is those who judge Eliza most harshly that are truly lacking in virtue. Eliza is scorned by her friends and Reverend Boyer for associating with Peter Sanford, a man widely known to be promiscuous, and when their ill-advised relationship results in Eliza's pregnancy, she is shunned by society. Hannah Webster Foster's sympathetic portrayal of Eliza Wharton implies that virtue is complex and multilayered, and that there is more to righteousness than chastity, or the abstention of sex.

As Eliza is pursued by both Reverend Boyer (a respected preacher) and Peter Sanford (an admitted libertine and rake), Eliza's friends attempt to appeal to her sense of morals and virtue, but their definition of virtue is extremely narrow and hinges on sexual purity more than anything. Eliza's friend and cousin, Mrs. Richman, explicitly warns Eliza that Sanford's intentions are not pure. "In my opinion," Mrs. Richman says, "[Major Sanford] is deficient in one of the great essentials of the character, and that is, *virtue*." She fears that Sanford's reputation as a womanizer will have a negative effect on Eliza's own reputation and perceived virtue.

As Lucy Sumner, Eliza's closest friend, also attempts to persuade Eliza to shun Major Sanford's advances she claims: "No female, whose mind is uncorrupted, can be indifferent to reputation. It is an inestimable jewel, the loss of which can never be repaired. While retained, it affords conscious peace to our own minds, and ensures the esteem and respect of all around us." If Eliza consents to a relationship with Sanford, no matter how innocent, she is likely to be sexually corrupted in the eyes of society simply for associating with him. Reverend Boyer, on the other hand, is man of high morals and standards and thus will be a better match for Eliza. Lucy assures Eliza that "Mr. Boyer's honor and good sense will never abridge any privileges which virtue can claim." Unlike Major Sanford, Eliza's association with Reverend Boyer does not adversely impact her reputation or perceived moral standing.

Eliza, however, has a different understanding of virtue that runs counter to the generally accepted definition. While broader society views sexual purity and virtue as one and the same, Eliza's definition is more inclusive. After Mrs. Richman warns Eliza of Sanford's inappropriate ways, Eliza responds, "But I despise those contracted ideas which confine virtue to a cell. I have no notion of becoming a recluse." Eliza criticizes the way that society defines virtue narrowly—or "confine[s] virtue to a cell"—because virtue can't be pinned down to just one thing. She already considers herself a good and righteous woman, and she doesn't believe that enjoying the company of Sanford or any other man should suggest otherwise. Although she is aware that Reverend Boyer's life as a preacher makes him a more agreeable match in the eyes of her friends and society, she can't help but find Sanford's comparably exciting life as a man of wealth and experience more enticing. "What a pity," Eliza tells Lucy, "that the graces and virtues are not often united! They must, however, meet in the man of my choice." Politeness is an important part of virtue, too—not just chastity. As Eliza continues to defend her affection for Sanford, she tells Lucy that "some of our old dons think him rather licentious; yet, for ought I can see, he is as strict an observer of decorum, as the best of them." By arguing that Sanford is in keeping with "decorum"—which means behavior that is proper and respectable—Eliza further emphasizes that Sanford is virtuous in many ways, even if he is a womanizer.

Sanford's intentions toward Eliza are neither honorable nor virtuous, and he ultimately leaves her pregnant and utterly alone, but not before Reverend Boyer accuses her of being "apparently inattentive" to the "decent virtue" of "prudence." Even Eliza's closest friends are critical of her choices, and Julia Granby claims that "[her] blood thrills with horror at [Eliza's] sacrifice of virtue." When Eliza confides in Julia the delicate state Sanford has left her in, Julia is harsh and unforgiving in her response. "You are ruined," she tells Eliza. "You have sacrificed your virtue to an abandoned, despicable profligate!"

Eliza later flees Connecticut, a disgrace and "reproach" to even her own friends and dies after giving birth to an illegitimate child at a **roadside inn**, but still her friends are shocked. "Happy would it have been," Lucy says, "had [Eliza] exerted an equal degree of fortitude in repelling the first attacks upon her virtue!" Lucy later looks for the lesson in Eliza's scandalous death and states, "I wish it engraved upon every heart, that virtue alone [...] can secure lasting felicity." Of course, "virtue alone" could not bring Eliza happiness, and Foster implies that Eliza's attraction to Sanford is not enough evidence to render her immoral. Instead, it is those with the greatest claim to virtue, namely Reverend Boyer and Eliza's self-righteous friends, who are lacking in morality, as seen through their harsh treatment of Eliza in her greatest time of need. In this vein, Foster implies that compassion and understanding are equally important in defining virtue and wholly absent in society's treatment of Eliza.

## MARRIAGE AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

Marriage is a central part of post-Revolutionary American society in *The Coquette*. Foster's protagonist, Eliza Wharton, is a single woman in her 30s, but her dear friends, General and Mrs. Richman, "are the picture of conjugal felicity." Another of Eliza's friends, Lucy Freeman, is to be married, as well, and their shared acquaintance, Julia Granby, is eager to follow in Lucy's footsteps. Eliza, however, doesn't share her friends' high regard of marriage, and neither does her new suitor, Peter Sanford. Despite their negative opinions of marriage, both Eliza and Sanford believe marriage also has its advantages, namely that it allows for instant wealth and social mobility. Still, Eliza and Sanford avoid marriage for as long as possible and, in the end, both are ruined and disgraced, alienated by the very society they once enjoyed. Foster's representation of marriage, including Eliza and Sanford's resistance to this widely respected institution, underscores the importance of marriage in early American society, but it also highlights its limitations—not everyone is destined for wedded bliss, and, for some, it can lead to heartache.

The importance of marriage is well established in *The Coquette*, but both Eliza and Sanford view it as oppressive and confining. Eliza's hand in marriage was once promised to Mr. Haly, a local

man several years her senior, but his untimely death relieves her of her duties. "A melancholy event has lately extricated me from those shackles," Eliza tells Lucy in a letter. Eliza's engagement to Mr. Haly was an arrangement of her parents, not a result of her own heart, and her reference to the near union as "shackles" implies that she likens marriage to prison or slavery.

Eliza later claims that "marriage is the tomb of friendship," which also suggests that marriage is like a dangerous trap that can't be escaped. In a letter on the subject, she asks Lucy why "people, in general, as soon as they are married, centre all their cares, their concerns, and pleasures in their own families." To do so, in Eliza's opinion, leaves friends "neglected or forgotten," and she is not eager to abandon her friends and attend to domestic responsibilities. Sanford likewise expresses an aversion to marriage, and even though he is exceedingly fond of Eliza, he is not prepared to marry her. "Were I disposed to marry, I am persuaded she would make an excellent wife," Sanford tells his friend, Charles Deighton, "but that you know is no part of my plan, so long as I can keep out of the noose." Sanford's reference to marriage as a "noose" suggests that he sees marriage as a sort of social death as well, emphasizing that marriage is a dangerous or even fatal restraint.

Regardless of Eliza and Sanford's views on marriage, neither can avoid it completely, but they both find consolation in the fact that marriage has the potential to secure wealth and allow for upward social mobility. Eliza's mother, Mrs. Wharton, encourages her to accept the advances of Reverend Boyer, a local preacher whose profession guarantees Eliza's lasting virtue and honor, but Eliza isn't convinced. "*This* man is not disagreeable to me; but if I must enter the connubial state, are there not *others*, who may be equally pleasing in their persons, and whose profession may be more comfortable to my taste?" The "*other*" man Eliza refers to is Major Sanford, a wealthy and accomplished man who is better equipped to provide Eliza with a life of luxury, unlike the meager living Reverend Boyer makes as a preacher.

Eliza speaks more plainly about money in a letter to Lucy. "[Major Sanford's] liberal fortune is extremely alluring to me, who, you know, have been hitherto confined to the rigid rules of prudence and economy, not to say, necessity in my finances." In other words, Eliza has never been rich, and she welcomes the chance to increase her fortune and rise in social status, even if she must use marriage to do so. Sanford's fortune, however, has been squandered by his "licentious" ways and is purely an illusion, and he is forced to marry Nancy, a wealthy woman from down south, to restore his social standing. "Necessity, dire necessity, forced me into this dernier resort," Sanford tells Charles in a letter, emphasizing that marriage was a last resort for him. "Five thousand pounds in possession, and more in reversion," Sanford says of Nancy. "This will compensate for some of my past mistakes, and set matters right for the present." Even though Sanford is in love with Eliza—as much as he can love any woman—he is ultimately forced to marry Nancy for the sake of money, which he, like Eliza, sees as the primary benefit of marriage.

Eliza never does marry, and she dies, alone and rejected by Reverend Boyer and society, after giving birth to Sanford's illegitimate stillborn **baby**. Sanford doesn't find lasting happiness either. He barely hides his affair with Eliza and openly expresses contempt for his wife, at which point she leaves him, taking her fortune with her. The fact that both Eliza and Sanford's demise is rooted in their aversion to marriage suggests that Foster supports the opinion that marriage is a sacred and crucial part of society. The only people who are truly happy in *The Coquette* are those with a healthy marriage, such as General and Mrs. Richman and Lucy and her new husband, Mr. Sumner, but these marriages are also blessed with the privilege of wealth and high social standing. Eliza endeavors to marry up in class and Sanford marries out of necessity to save the lifestyle he is accustomed to, but in both cases, a desire for wealth and disregard for the sanctity of marriage undeniably leads to their unhappiness and despair. In this way, Foster implies that not everyone marries for the same reasons and that some marriages will never be successful or happy.

## FRIENDSHIP

To Eliza Wharton, friendship is the most important aspect of life. She is incredibly dedicated to her friends, and in an epistolary novel consisting entirely of letters, Eliza frequently corresponds with her closest friends but writes her mother, Mrs. Wharton, only twice. Eliza has "a temper peculiarly formed for the enjoyments of social life," which she values above all else. She even dismisses marriage in large part because she considers it "the tomb of friendship" and refuses to give up her friends and active social calendar. Eliza spends extended periods of time visiting her out-of-town friends, and she regularly seeks their guidance and comfort in navigating issues of romance and marriage. The patriarchal society of eighteenth-century America expects Eliza to marry and settle down with an honorable man, but her "natural disposition for gaiety" makes this nearly impossible. As Eliza attempts—and fails—to conform to society's expectations, she turns to her friends for support but is met with scorn and criticism. In this vein, while Foster seems to argue that friendship, especially female friendship, can soothe and ease the restrictions and injustices of the patriarchy, she also implies that friendship can bolster patriarchal oppression, as well.

Eliza frequently looks to her friends for comfort and advice, suggesting that friendship is both the wellspring of Eliza's happiness and the backbone of her life. In a letter to her friend Lucy, Eliza writes: "Fortune, indeed, has not been very liberal in her gifts to me; but I presume on a large stock in the bank of

friendship, which, united with health and innocence, give me some pleasing anticipations of future felicity." Eliza doesn't have much money, but she is rich in friendship, and this is the primary source of her happiness. When Peter Sanford, a known libertine and womanizer, turns his attention to Eliza, she suspects her cousin and close friend, Mrs. Richman, does not approve. Eliza is unaware of Sanford's "debauched" reputation, and she relies on her friendship with Mrs. Richman to tell her what her cousin is otherwise too polite to say. "I shall apply the chymical powers of friendship and extract the secret," Eliza says, knowing mutual friendship will ease truth and elicit advice. After Eliza entertains Sanford's advances and alienates Reverend Boyer, an honorable man and suitable husband, she immediately regrets her actions and tries to win back Boyer's affection. As Eliza waits for his answer, she writes Lucy and begs her to write back. "I stand in need of the consoling power of friendship," Eliza writes. "Nothing can beguile my pensive hours, and exhilarate my drooping spirits, like your letters." Eliza knows that Boyer is unlikely to take her back, and she can only be comforted by Lucy's friendly words and reassurances, which once again emphasizes that Eliza sees her friendships as sources of support and nourishment.

However, Eliza's friends do little to comfort or reassure her, and instead of supporting her, they are openly critical of her. Their scorn reinforces the patriarchal oppression Eliza is trying to overcome. When Eliza initially writes Lucy and tells her about the attention of both Sanford and Boyer, she immediately encourages Eliza to stick with Boyer. "Forgive my plainness," Lucy writes Eliza. "It is the task of friendship, sometimes to tell disagreeable truths." She further tells Eliza that Boyer's "station in life is, perhaps, as elevated as [Eliza] has a right to claim," and that she should "lay aside her coquettish airs" and act "with that modest freedom, that dignified unreserve which bespeaks conscious rectitude and sincerity of heart." In other words, Sanford's high social standing makes him too good for Eliza, and the modest living of the Reverend Boyer is "perhaps" the best Eliza can hope for. Regardless, Lucy implores Eliza to stop behaving in flirtatious ways and entertaining multiple men at once, behavior she indirectly implies makes Eliza undignified and immoral.

Julia Granby, a friend of both Eliza and Lucy, writes to Eliza about the time Lucy rebuked the advances of a "reformed rake" before she married Mr. Sumner. "I hope neither you, nor I," Julia says to Eliza, "shall ever be tried by a man of debauched principles. Such characters I conceive to be totally unfit for the society of women, who have any claim to virtue and delicacy." Of course, Julia is fully aware of Eliza's affection for Sanford despite his rakish ways, and her passive-aggressive comment is an underhanded way of calling Eliza "debauched," as well and implying she is without "virtue and delicacy." Even Reverend Boyer, once he dismisses Eliza as a romantic interest, insults her character under the auspices of friendship. "There is a levity in your manners, which is inconsistent with the solidary and decorum becoming a lady who has arrived to years of discretion," Boyer writes Eliza. "There is also an unwarrantable extravagance betrayed in your dress. […] Too large a portion of your time is devoted to the adorning of your person." What Boyer only recently considered Eliza's more attractive and desirable traits he now holds against her. "I wish you to regard this letter as the legacy of a friend," he concludes, again relying on friendship to relay his damning message.

Boyer never does take Eliza back, and she is driven further into Sanford's "debauched" arms. Just as Eliza's friends warn, however, Sanford's intentions aren't pure, and he marries another woman for her money, abandoning Eliza without explanation. He returns a year later and continues his seduction of Eliza, leaving her pregnant and unmarried in an unforgiving society. Just when Eliza needs the support of her friends the most, she is forced to flee town and dies alone at a **roadside inn**. "I have not the resolution to encounter the tears of my friends," Eliza claims, "and therefore seek shelter among strangers." Her affair with Sanford has made Eliza "the reproach of her friends," and she runs rather than faces their harsh judgment.

## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

### THE ROADSIDE INN AT DANVERS

The roadside inn at Danvers where Eliza Wharton goes to give birth to her **baby** symbolizes the oppression of women in Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette*. Danvers, a town located in northern Massachusetts, was originally known as Salem Village, the historic site of the notorious witch trials of 1692, where 14 women were hanged as witches. The 1692 hangings in Salem have long since been understood as a form of persecution against women perceived to be different or threatening, and the fact that Eliza ends up in this very place over a hundred years later, herself the victim of oppression and misunderstanding because of her perceived differences as a woman, is certainly ironic.

Eliza runs off to the inn at Danvers from her home in Hartford, Connecticut, after an affair with Major Sanford, a known rake, results in her pregnancy. She has no reason to believe that her friends, family, or broader society will ever accept her again, since she has strayed so far from the realm of acceptable womanly behavior, so she runs to Danvers, where she dies not long after the death of her child. Eliza runs to Danvers because the sexist nature of post-Revolutionary America's patriarchal society has forced her out of respectable life. She refuses to conform to the narrow ideals of acceptable womanhood, and

she is summarily scorned and sidelined. Eliza's death at the inn at Danvers is a fitting end to her plight and is in keeping with the trials of the women in Salem Village in 1692.

## BABIES

Babies symbolize the danger and drawbacks of marriage and the domestic sphere. Three babies are born in *The Coquette*: the General and Mrs. Richman have a baby, Major Sanford has a baby with his wife, Nancy, and Sanford also has a baby with Eliza Wharton. Sadly, all three babies die, and while this is certainly not unheard of in 1797 (a time when infant death was common), the fact that all of the babies in the novel die is significant: it seems to suggest that marriage is not always the blissful experience eighteenth-century America's patriarchal society will have women believe, and that the domestic sphere, while certainly enjoyable and rewarding to many, is not always full of happiness. Of course, the General and Mrs. Richman have an exceedingly happy marriage—Eliza refers to them as "a picture of conjugal felicity"—but even they are not immune to the heartache caused by the death of their infant daughter.

Conversely, Major Sanford's marriage to Nancy is exceedingly unhappy. He treats his wife with disrespect and is really in love with Eliza. Sanford only marries Nancy for her money, and by the time she gives birth to their son, who dies immediately after, their marriage is all but over. Eliza's own baby dies at **the inn at Danvers**, after both she and Sanford are disgraced in the eyes of society—Sanford for his rakish ways and his affair with Eliza, and Eliza for her attraction to Sanford and initial refusal to settle down and marry the Reverend Boyer. With the death of Sanford's babies with both Eliza and Nancy, Foster implies that while Sanford and Eliza should not have approached marriage with such indifference and disregard, marriage simply isn't for everyone and shouldn't be presented as the only option for respectable women (and men) in America's new and developing nation.

## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Dover Publications edition of *The Coquette* published in 2015.

### Letter 4 Quotes

I was introduced to Miss Eliza Wharton; a young lady whose elegant person, accomplished mind, and polished manners have been much celebrated. […] You will think, that I talk in the style of a lover. I confess it, nor am I ashamed to rank myself among the professed admirers of this lovely fair one. I am in no danger, however, of becoming an enthusiastic devotee. No, I mean to act upon just and rational principles. Expecting soon to settle in an eligible situation, if such a companion as I am persuaded she will make me, may fall to my lot, I shall deem myself as happy as this state of imperfection will admit. She is now resident at Gen. Richman's. The general and his lady are her particular friends. They are warm in her praises. They tell me, however, that she is naturally of a gay disposition. No matter for that; it is an agreeable quality, where there is discretion sufficient for its regulation. A cheerful friend, much more a cheerful wife is peculiarly necessary to a person of a studious and sedentary life.

**Related Characters:** Reverend J. Boyer (speaker), Miss Eliza Wharton, Mr. T. Selby

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 6

**Explanation and Analysis**

This quote, which appears in a letter from Reverend Boyer to his friend, Mr. Selby, occurs after Boyer meets Eliza for the first time. This quote introduces Boyer's intention to marry Eliza, but it also underscores the pressure put upon Eliza to behave as a proper, eighteenth-century woman. Boyer first describes Eliza as "elegant," "accomplished," and "polished," which suggests that an ideal woman is beautiful, educated, and refined—no doubt a tall order. These impossibly high standards are not easily met and are just one form of female oppression common in post-Revolutionary America's patriarchal society.

This quote also highlights Eliza's coquettish tendencies. While Boyer doesn't call her a coquette directly in this quote, his language certainly hints at it. He claims to "rank" himself among her "admirers," which implies Eliza has a long line of men looking to spend time with her. Boyer speaks of her "naturally gay disposition," which is to say Eliza is a little too friendly with men, but this doesn't initially bother him. In fact, he sees Eliza's "gay disposition" as a positive thing to augment his more serious life as a preacher, which exposes him as a hypocrite when he later cites Eliza's behavior as a reason for leaving her. Boyer's initial compliments of Eliza also reflect the connection between chastity and virtue in early American society; Eliza is only a good and virtuous

woman in Boyer's (and greater society's) eyes if she also behaves with "discretion" where matters of men and sex are concerned.

## Letter 5 Quotes

❝ What, my dear, is your opinion of our favorite Mr. Boyer? Declaring him your favorite, madam, is sufficient to render me partial to him. But to be frank, independent of that, I think him an agreeable man. Your heart, I presume, is now free? Yes, and I hope it will long remain so. Your friends, my dear, solicitous for your welfare, wish to see you suitably and agreeably connected. I hope my friends will never again interpose in my concerns of that nature. You, madam, who have ever known my heart, are sensible, that had the Almighty spared life, in a certain instance, I must have sacrificed my own happiness, or incurred their censure. I am young, gay, volatile. A melancholy event has lately extricated me from those shackles, which parental authority had imposed on my mind. Let me then enjoy that freedom which I so highly prize. Let me have opportunity, unbiassed by opinion, to gratify my natural disposition in a participation of those pleasures which youth and innocence afford.

**Related Characters:** Miss Eliza Wharton (speaker), Mr. Haly, Reverend J. Boyer, Mrs. Richman, Miss Lucy Freeman/Mrs. Lucy Sumner

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 8

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs in a letter from Eliza to Lucy Freeman, and it chronicles a conversation Eliza had with Mrs. Richman regarding Eliza's feelings for the Reverend Boyer. Mrs. Richman is clearly partial to Boyer and would like to see her cousin and dear friend married to such a man. While Eliza admits that Boyer is "agreeable," a rather boring compliment that reflects her lukewarm attraction to him, she is more than clear that she wishes her friends to stay out of her romantic life and "never again interpose in [her] concerns of that nature." Of course, Mrs. Richman completely ignores Eliza's request for independence and continues to push her in the direction of Boyer, which reflects Mrs. Richman's disregard for Eliza's true feelings and happiness and undermines their friendship.

This quote also explains Eliza's engagement to Mr. Haly and her aversion to marriage. Had Mr. Haly lived, Eliza would have been forced to live a life confined to the domestic sphere, which she has no desire to do; and had she rejected married life and lived freely as she desired, she would have met "censure," or public scorn and alienation. These rather undesirable choices underscore the limitations set upon women in the 1700s—Eliza was presented with only two courses of action, neither of which she wanted. Mr. Haly's death means that Eliza has escaped the "shackles" of a marriage arranged by her parents, and she is again free to explore her freedom as a young, beautiful, and unattached woman. While Eliza is resistant to any marriage, she seems to be particularly against those that are arranged, which she implies completely neglect a woman's heart and autonomy.

❝ Of such pleasures, no one, my dear, would wish to deprive you. But beware, Eliza! —Though strowed with flowers, when contemplated by your lively imagination, it is, after all, a slippery, thorny path. The round of fashionable dissipation is dangerous. A phantom is often pursued, which leaves its deluded votary the real form of wretchedness. She spoke with an emphasis, and taking up her candle, wished me a good night. I had not power to return the compliment. Something seemingly prophetic in her looks and expressions, cast a momentary gloom upon my mind! But I despise those contracted ideas which confine virtue to a cell. I have no notion of becoming a recluse. Mrs. Richman has ever been a beloved friend of mine; yet I always thought her rather prudish.

**Related Characters:** Miss Eliza Wharton (speaker), Mrs. Richman, Miss Lucy Freeman/Mrs. Lucy Sumner

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 8

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote also occurs in Eliza's letter to Lucy, and it reflects Mrs. Richman's response to Eliza's desire to remain unattached and avoid marriage. Eliza wishes to date multiple men—that is, she wants to play the field a bit before settling down—but Mrs. Richman implies this behavior is tantamount to immorality, and this again reflects the connection between sex and virtue in post-Revolutionary American society. Mrs. Richman claims that "fashionable dissipation," or *any* debauchery or perceived sex out of wedlock, is a "slippery" slope. Eliza wishes for freedom and happiness; which Mrs. Richman implies is "a phantom" pursuit and can't be found in behavior so distasteful. She claims these pursuits only lead to "wretchedness," or a life of unhappiness and sin.

Eliza's reaction to her friend's sanctimonious advice suggests that their friendship is quite strained. Eliza doesn't

even wish Mrs. Richman a good night as she leaves the room, an omission that reflects Eliza's irritation with her. Eliza claims to "despise those contracted ideas which confine virtue to a cell," which is to say she hates notions of virtue that rely solely upon sexual purity. Eliza is a good and righteous person regardless of how many men she spends time with, and she resents Mrs. Richman's insinuations that she isn't. Furthermore, Eliza has not yet behaved in a way that threatens her sexual purity, yet the mere implication of sex is enough to brand her lacking in morality, which is not only "prudish," but immoral as well. Mrs. Richman is judgmental and critical, which author Foster implies is equally lacking in virtue.

## Letter 8 Quotes

❝ I first saw [Miss Eliza Wharton] on a party of pleasure at Mr. Frazier's where we walked, talked, sung, and danced together. I thought her cousin watched her with a jealous eye; for she is, you must know, a prude; and immaculate, more so than you or I must be the man who claims admission to her society. But I fancy this young lady is a coquette; and if so, I shall avenge my sex, by retaliating the mischiefs, she meditates against us. Not that I have any ill designs; but only to play off her own artillery, by using a little unmeaning gallantry. And let her beware of the consequences.

**Related Characters:** Major Peter Sanford (speaker), Mrs. Richman, Miss Eliza Wharton, Mr. Charles Deighton

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 12

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage occurs in a letter from Sanford to Charles Deighton, and while it tells of the first time Sanford met Eliza, it also underscores the sexist nature of post-Revolutionary American society. Sanford tells Charles that he had a pleasant first meeting with Eliza, yet Eliza's cousin, Mrs. Richman, whom Sanford fancies a "prude," is obviously disapproving. He believes Mrs. Richman is "jealous" of Eliza's free nature. As a married woman, it would be inappropriate for Mrs. Richman to behave in such a way, and Sanford implies that Mrs. Richman secretly desires this freedom. Eliza, however, is expected to live up to the standard that Mrs. Richman has set, a standard that is "immaculate" and beyond consorting with men like Sanford, or Charles for that matter.

Sanford thinks that Eliza is a "coquette," which is to say a flirt, and he hopes to "avenge [his] sex" by beating her at her own flirtatious game. Sanford doesn't wish to hurt Eliza as he has no "ill designs," he only means to enter a fun and meaningless relationship with her. He has no intention of pursuing anything greater, such as marriage, and he knows that this type of relationship will reflect badly on Eliza's reputation as a virtuous lady in society, but he cares very little. As a man, Sanford's womanizing actions have very little consequence in society (beyond the scorn of "prudes" like Mrs. Richman), but the consequences for women are much more severe. Eliza could be rendered a social outcast or worse, but Sanford is content to "let her beware of the consequences" and pursues her anyway. The double standard present in this passage reflects the sexism present in Eliza's patriarchal society—men are free to act as they desire, whereas women are punished for the same behavior.

## Letter 9 Quotes

❝ My friends were waiting for me in the parlor. They received me sociably, inquired after my health, my last evening's entertainment, the company, &c. When, after a little pause, Mrs. Richman said, and how do you like Major Sanford, Eliza? Very well indeed, madam: I think him a finished gentleman. Will you, who are a connoisseur, allow him that title? No, my dear: in my opinion, he falls far below it; since he is deficient in one of the great essentials of the character, and that is, virtue. I am surprised, said I: but how has he incurred so severe a censure? By being a professed libertine; by having but too successfully practiced the arts of seduction; by triumphing in the destruction of innocence and the peace of families!

**Related Characters:** Miss Eliza Wharton (speaker), Major Peter Sanford, General Richman, Mrs. Richman, Miss Lucy Freeman/Mrs. Lucy Sumner

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 14

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears in one of Eliza's letters to Lucy, and it establishes Major Peter Sanford as a womanizer. The letter outlines a conversation Eliza had with Mrs. Richman after returning home late from a date with Sanford, and it emphasizes Mrs. Richman's distrust (and outright disgust) of men like Sanford. This quote also underscores Mrs. Richman's self-righteousness. She knows that Eliza is fond of Major Sanford and she has been eagerly waiting for an opportunity to tell Eliza that he is lacking in character and virtue. Eliza finds Sanford "a finished gentleman," meaning

he has been perfectly polite and appropriate in his actions toward her, which is enough to earn him Eliza's regard and esteem. Eliza knows nothing of Sanford's debauched past and therefore sees no reason to keep him at arm's length.

Mrs. Richman's opinion of Sanford also reflects early American society's understanding that one's virtue is intimately linked to their chastity. As Sanford is not yet married, his sexual exploits dictate that he is without virtue and utterly immoral. He is also a "professed libertine," which suggests Sanford rejects matters of organized religion and embraces sex, and this language also directly links sexual behavior to righteousness and morality. Mrs. Richman's opinion of Sanford is meant to warn Eliza away from his company, which is sure, by association, to contaminate Eliza's virtue as well.

## Letter 11 Quotes

I believe too, that I have charmed the eye at least, of the amiable Eliza. Indeed, Charles, she is a fine girl. I think it would hurt my conscience to wound her mind or reputation. Were I disposed to marry, I am persuaded she would make an excellent wife; but that you know is no part of my plan, so long as I can keep out of the noose. Whenever I do submit to be shackled, it must be from a necessity of mending my fortune. This girl would be far from doing that. However, I am pleased with her acquaintance, and mean not to abuse her credulity and good nature, if I can help it.

**Related Characters:** Major Peter Sanford (speaker), Miss Eliza Wharton, Mr. Charles Deighton

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 16

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage appears in another of Sanford's letters to Charles, and it is significant because it reveals Sanford's true feelings for Eliza. Sanford *is* falling in love with Eliza, and even though his past as a libertine suggests that he is incapable of sincere feelings, he certainly feels strongly about her. Indeed, his feelings are so strong that "it would hurt [his] conscience to wound her mind or reputation." Initially, Sanford cared very little if Eliza looked bad for associating with a libertine, and now it causes him pain. Still, Sanford is opposed to marriage and this quote underscores that, as well. He refers to any marriage as "a noose," which suggests he likens such a union to the death of his social life and womanizing ways.

This quote also reveals Sanford's dwindling fortune and the sham that is his social persona as a wealthy man. He will only consent to marriage if a woman has money, which under eighteenth-century law would automatically become Sanford's. He will only be "shackled," or tied down, under these circumstances, and Eliza doesn't bring any wealth to the table. While this passage speaks to Sanford's deception and his selfish character, it also emphasizes the importance of money and social status in early American society. Sanford loves Eliza as much as he can love any woman, yet he refuses to marry her and denies his own happiness just to maintain his social standing.

## Letter 12 Quotes

Marriage is the tomb of friendship. It appears to me a very selfish state. Why do people, in general, as soon as they are married, centre all their cares, their concerns, and pleasures in their own families? former acquaintances are neglected or forgotten. The tenderest ties between friends are weakened, or dissolved; and benevolence itself moves in a very limited sphere.

**Related Characters:** Miss Eliza Wharton (speaker), Mrs. Richman, Miss Lucy Freeman/Mrs. Lucy Sumner

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 18

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage is included in one of Eliza's letters to Lucy, and it is important because it highlights Eliza's own aversion to marriage. There is nothing in Eliza's life more important than her friends, and she frequently writes them and spends time with them. Eliza's "naturally gay," or flirtatious, disposition means that she is particularly suited to social affairs, and she is unwilling to give up this freedom and retire to the domestic sphere. As a woman in the patriarchal society of post-Revolutionary America, it is expected that Eliza will marry and have a family, who will then become, by tradition, the most important people in her life.

Indeed, Eliza watches her own friend, Mrs. Richman, retire from social life once she becomes pregnant. After the birth of Mrs. Richman's baby, she is completely consumed by "conjugal and paternal love" and has very little time or inclination for friends or social engagements. Eliza views this lifestyle as a sort of social death, and she claims to care too much for her friends to abandon them. Eliza's commitment to her friends and her unwillingness to leave their company makes their later rejection of her after she

sacrifices her virtue to Major Sanford all the more powerful and heartbreaking.

## Letter 14 Quotes

❝ From a scene of constraint and confinement, ill suited to my years and inclination, I have just launched into society. My heart beats high in expectation of its fancied joys. My sanguine imagination paints, in alluring colors, the charms of youth and freedom, regulated by virtue and innocence. Of these, I wish to partake. While I own myself under obligations for the esteem which you are pleased to profess for me, and in return, acknowledge, that neither your person nor manners are disagreeable to me, I recoil at the thought of immediately forming a connection, which must confine me to the duties of domestic life, and make me dependent for happiness, perhaps too, for subsistence, upon a class of people, who will claim the right of scrutinizing every part of my conduct; and by censuring those foibles, which I am conscious of not having prudence to avoid, may render me completely miserable.

**Related Characters:** Miss Eliza Wharton (speaker), Mr. Haly, Reverend J. Boyer, Mrs. Richman, Miss Lucy Freeman/ Mrs. Lucy Sumner

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 21

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote is also from one of Eliza's letters to Lucy, and it involves a conversation Eliza had with Mrs. Richman about her desire to see Eliza's hand promised to the Reverend Boyer. Here, Eliza again makes plain her desire to remain unmarried and her distaste for the domestic sphere. She again references her previous engagement to Mr. Haly, "a scene" which Eliza claims was full of "constraint and confinement," and assumes that her natural disposition for pleasure is incompatible with such a life. Because of this near marriage, Eliza values her freedom far too much to immediately give up her place in society and consent to Reverend Boyer's proposal. It is not that Eliza dislikes Boyer (on the contrary, she rather enjoys him); she simply does not wish to be married to any man and would rather be free to exercise her flirtatious ways—within reason, or "regulated by virtue and innocence," of course.

This quote also underscores the judgmental ways of Eliza's friends, and she openly accuses them of such. While Eliza's circle of acquaintances is likely to grow larger if she marries Boyer, her own friends will remain. These "friends" are the same people who Eliza fears "will claim the right of scrutinizing every part of [her] conduct." As Eliza feels she is poorly suited to marriage, these friends will undoubtedly "censure [her] foibles"—that is to say criticize her mistakes—and "render [her] completely miserable." The operative word in this sentence is "completely." Eliza's friends *already* scrutinize her every move and make her fairly miserable, so she has no cause to think they will not do the same once she is married. Then, the only difference will be that she won't have her cherished social life to lift her spirits, which therefore will "render [her] completely miserable."

## Letter 23 Quotes

❝ Miss Wharton and I, said Mrs. Richman, must beg leave to differ from you, madam. We think ourselves interested in the welfare and prosperity of our country; and, consequently, claim the right of inquiring into those affairs, which may conduce to, or interfere with the common weal. We shall not be called to the senate or the field to assert its privileges, and defend its rights, but we shall feel for the honor and safety of our friends and connections, who are thus employed. If the community flourish and enjoy health and freedom, shall we not share in the happy effects? if it be oppressed and disturbed, shall we not endure our proportion of the evil? Why then should the love of our country be a masculine passion only? Why should government, which involves the peace and order of the society, of which we are a part, be wholly excluded from our observation? Mrs. Laurence made some slight reply and waived the subject. The gentlemen applauded Mrs. Richman's sentiments as truly Roman; and what was more, they said, truly republican.

**Related Characters:** Mr. T. Selby (speaker), Mrs. Laurence, Mrs. Richman, Miss Eliza Wharton, Reverend J. Boyer

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 34-5

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs in one of Mr. Selby's letters to Reverend Boyer. It outlines a conversation between Mrs. Richman and Mrs. Laurence concerning politics, and it underscores the sexist nature of eighteenth-century America's patriarchal society. Mrs. Laurence believes discussions about politics are best left to men, but Eliza and Mrs. Richman disagree. Mrs. Laurence's opinion is in keeping with that of greater society—the operations of the new nation are entirely too complicated and important for women. Mrs. Richman, however, is deeply concerned with the well-being and

growth of the nation. She is, as she says, a part of the nation and is subject to its successes and failures, so she believes it only appropriate that she is afforded an opinion.

While Mrs. Richman's voice and argument are commendable, she does resign rather quickly to the fact that, as a woman, she cannot "be called to the senate or the field to assert [the country's] privileges" or "defend its rights." She views her freedom to comment on the state of the nation as a sort of recompense for being excluded as a true and equal citizen, and this appears to be adequate compensation for her, even though it is unlikely her opinions will ever reach beyond her social circle. The men "applaud [her] sentiments as truly Roman" and "truly republican," but this obvious pat on the back suggests that they are aware that her voice is largely ineffectual. As representatives of the patriarchy, the men get to have their cake and eat it too; Mrs. Richman is satisfied with the freedom to voice her opinions and the men know it will probably never amount to much. In this vein, Foster implies that it is not only men who support the patriarchy—women are guilty of upholding it as well.

## Letter 27 Quotes

❝ I am quite a convert to Pope's assertion, that "Every woman is, at heart, a rake." How else can we account for the pleasure which they evidently receive from the society, the flattery, the caresses of men of that character? Even the most virtuous of them seem naturally prone to gaiety, to pleasure, and, I had almost said, to dissipation! How else shall we account for the existence of this disposition, in your favorite fair? It cannot be the result of her education. Such a one as she has received, is calculated to give her a very different turn of mind. You must forgive me, my friend, for I am a little vexed, and alarmed on your account.

**Related Characters:** Mr. T. Selby (speaker), Miss Eliza Wharton, Major Peter Sanford, Reverend J. Boyer

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 42-3

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears in one of Mr. Selby's letters to Reverend Boyer, and it also underscores the sexism present in late eighteenth-century American society. Eliza's free and social behavior has led Selby to fear that she may be a coquette, and this passage echoes that fear. Selby quotes Alexander Pope, a popular eighteenth-century British poet who was a key player in the Enlightenment. Pope's personal philosophies had a great impact on society, both in England and abroad, and Selby's reference to Pope's book of poems, *Moral Essay II*, is proof of this. Pope claims that all women are rakes, or coquettish flirts looking to sleep with as many men as possible, and Selby likewise agrees, yet another reflection of the widespread resentment towards women by men, and society at large, during the eighteenth century.

Selby claims that Eliza is "prone" to "dissipation" simply because she is a woman, which is to say that she is likely to indulge in debauchery and sex because her gender drives her to it. Obviously, this is a ridiculous assertion, but it suggests that Selby is uncomfortable, at the very least, with Eliza's friendly and suggestive behavior. Selby has no proof that Eliza has behaved inappropriately with Sanford, yet he assumes she has just because she is a woman. He can't imagine Eliza's coquetry is "the result of her education" since she has received topnotch schooling as expected, so it must be, according to Selby, an innate quality of her sex. This opinion also reflects that of greater society, and it serves to further oppress and marginalize early American women.

## Letter 28 Quotes

❝ I have not yet determined to seduce her, though, with all her pretensions to virtue, I do not think it impossible. And if I should, she can blame none but herself, since she knows my character, and has no reason to wonder if I act consistently with it. If she will play with a lion, let her beware of his paw, I say.

**Related Characters:** Major Peter Sanford (speaker), Miss Eliza Wharton, Mr. Charles Deighton

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 45

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears in one of Sanford's letters to Charles about Sanford's infatuation with Eliza, and it too emphasizes sexism in American society. This quote is also noteworthy because it makes plain Sanford's rakish character as a professed libertine. Presumably, Sanford attempts to seduce every woman he courts, as that is his reputation, and Eliza will be no different. Even though Sanford pretends that seduction isn't necessarily his plan, it is implied that he was always going to make Eliza one of his conquests, and that her coquettish behavior makes her an easy target. Like Eliza's friends, Sanford assumes that Eliza's flirtatious ways mean she has loose morals, and this is reflected in his reference to "her pretensions to virtue."

Sanford does not believe that Eliza's seduction will be impossible, or even difficult for that matter.

This quote also underscores the double standard present in early American society regarding sex and gender. Sanford knows his treatment of Eliza leaves much to be desired and that using her for sex—which will in turn ruin her reputation and result in her being shunned from society—is a bad idea, but he refuses to apologize. Eliza is fully aware of Sanford's reputation as a libertine, and because of this, Sanford asserts, she enters any relationship with him at her own risk. Eliza should know that her virtue is not safe with Sanford, and if she fails to stay away, or consents to "play with a lion," it is entirely her own fault if she catches his "paw" and things end badly. As a man, Sanford is wholly excused for his bad behavior and lacking morals, while Eliza is held responsible for both her tainted virtue and his.

## Letter 31 Quotes

❝ I look upon the vicious habits, and abandoned character of Major Sanford, to have more pernicious effects on society, than the perpetrations of the robber and the assassin. These, when detected, are rigidly punished by the laws of the land. If their lives be spared, they are shunned by society, and treated with every mark of disapprobation and contempt. But to the disgrace of humanity and virtue, the assassin of honor; the wretch, who breaks the peace of families, who robs virgin innocence of its charms, who triumphs over the ill placed confidence of the inexperienced, unsuspecting, and too credulous fair, is received, and caressed, not only by his own sex, to which he is a reproach, but even by ours, who have every conceivable reason to despise and avoid him. Influenced by these principles, I am neither ashamed nor afraid openly to avow my sentiments of this man, and my reasons for treating him with the most pointed neglect.

**Related Characters:** Miss Lucy Freeman/Mrs. Lucy Sumner (speaker), Major Peter Sanford, Miss Eliza Wharton

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 50

### Explanation and Analysis

This passage is included in Lucy's letter to Eliza after she learns that Eliza has quit the company of Major Peter Sanford, a man Lucy considers to be a rake. This quote is significant because it underscores Lucy's absolute contempt for Sanford, but it also echoes her own self-righteousness and her harsh judgement of Eliza as a coquette, the female counterpart to Sanford's rakish character. Lucy considers the sexually promiscuous behavior of Sanford every bit as dangerous and damaging to society as major crimes, such as murder and theft, and she marvels at the fact that others don't seem to share this opinion. "Assassins" and "robbers" are received with disdain and suspicion, yet Sanford is received by men and women alike as charming. If it was up to Lucy, Sanford would be completely "shunned by society," if his life is even to "be spared," that is.

Furthermore, every negative and damning thing Lucy says about Sanford Lucy is, in effect, also saying to Eliza, whom Lucy labels as a coquette. Eliza enters into a sexual relationship with Sanford—a married man—whose wife subsequently divorces him. In this way, Eliza is certainly guilty (at least partially as to not ignore Sanford's role) of "breaking the peace of [his] family." Whether or not Eliza was "too credulous," or naive and gullible, to realize Sanford's plan is debatable. Either way, Eliza certainly shares in the blame of the ruin of Sanford's family, and Lucy implies this behavior warrants complete banishment from society, and potentially even a death sentence. Lucy's harsh judgement and intolerance of Eliza's behavior undermines their friendship and suggests that Lucy doesn't cherish their friendship quite to the extent Eliza does.

## Enclosed in the Foregoing Quotes

❝ Many faults have been visible to me; over which my affection once drew a veil. That veil is now removed. And, acting the part of a disinterested friend, I shall mention some few of them with freedom. There is a levity in your manners, which is inconsistent with the solidity and decorum becoming a lady who has arrived to years of discretion. There is also an unwarrantable extravagance betrayed in your dress. Prudence and economy are such necessary, at least, such decent virtues, that they claim the attention of every female, whatever be her station or her property. To these virtues you are apparently inattentive. Too large a portion of your time is devoted to the adorning of your person.

**Related Characters:** Reverend J. Boyer (speaker), Mr. T. Selby, Miss Eliza Wharton

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 69

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears in the letter Reverend Boyer sends to Eliza to formally end their courtship. It highlights the oppression of women in early American society, but it also emphasizes the role friendship plays in keeping women in

line with patriarchal ideals of womanhood. Now that Boyer and Eliza are no longer romantically involved and are merely friends, Boyer uses this friendship to openly insult Eliza. He claims that the "levity in [Eliza's] manners" (her cheerful and flirtatious ways) is "inconsistent" with the "lady" she has been groomed to be. Patriarchal society expects Eliza to be chaste and refined, and this is Boyer's way of telling her to shape up. His reference to Eliza's dress as "an unwarrantable extravagance" suggests that her clothes are both expensive and inappropriate, or possibly too revealing. Boyer implies that Eliza is also guilty of vanity, which is to say she is selfish and conceited. These insults are not in keeping with typical notions of womanhood, and they also imply that Eliza is morally bankrupt. Boyer's scathing break-up letter is his attempt to hurt Eliza and steer her back into a more acceptable lane of womanhood.

Boyer claims that his romantic feelings for Eliza pulled a "veil" over his eyes that made him unable to see these perceived faults sooner, but this is not entirely true. Eliza's "levity" was one of the things Boyer first noticed about her, and he initially thought it a positive trait. He claimed that Eliza's cheerfulness would brighten his more serious profession as a preacher and keep life from getting too dull, but now it is grounds for contempt. Boyer also enjoyed and appreciated Eliza's beauty before this letter, but that too is now a mark against her. Boyer cannot control Eliza's behavior and is threatened by her freedom and beauty, so he uses ridicule under the auspices of friendship to keep her in line with eighteenth-century patriarchal ideals of womanhood.

## Letter 43 Quotes

❝ How natural, and how easy the transition from one stage of life to another! Not long since I was a gay, volatile girl; seeking satisfaction in fashionable circles and amusements; but now I am thoroughly domesticated. All my happiness is centered within the limits of my own walls; and I grudge every moment that calls me from the pleasing scenes of domestic life. Not that I am so selfish as to exclude my friends from my affection or society. I feel interested in their concerns, and enjoy their company. I must own, however, that conjugal and parental love are the main springs of my life. The conduct of some mothers in depriving their helpless offspring of the care and kindness which none but a mother can feel, is to me unaccountable. There are many nameless attentions which nothing short of maternal tenderness, and solicitude can pay; and for which the endearing smiles, and progressive improvements of the lovely babe are an ample reward.

**Related Characters:** Mrs. Richman (speaker), Reverend J. Boyer, Miss Eliza Wharton

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 80

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote occurs in one of Mrs. Richman's letters to Eliza, and it is significant because it highlights the importance of marriage and the domestic sphere within eighteenth-century American society. Mrs. Richman is wholly dedicated to her life as a wife—and, as the mother to an infant daughter, she is likewise dedicated to this new role, as well. Mrs. Richman's baby serves as a symbol of her successful and happy marriage, and it is further proof that she is living her life in keeping with the popular standards of womanhood. She implies that "the transition" to motherhood was easy and almost natural, and she hates being called away from her home and family. She takes her domestic role seriously and condemns those women who don't conform to her strict ideals.

Women in post-Revolutionary America's patriarchal society are valued as wives and mothers, and Eliza knows that a similar life is expected of her; however, she has no desire to live such a confined life. Unlike Mrs. Richman, Eliza's friends and her active social life "are the main springs of [her] life," and she is unwilling to sacrifice them for marriage and babies. Even Mrs. Richman admits that motherhood is a lot of work, which is reflected in the "many nameless attentions which nothing short of maternal tenderness, and solicitude can pay," and because of this, she has limited time for friends. This is precisely what Eliza *doesn't* want, and instead of encouraging Eliza to marry and have a family, Mrs. Richman's dedication to domestic life only makes Eliza want it even less.

## Letter 52 Quotes

❝ The circus is a place of fashionable resort of late, but not agreeable to me. I think it inconsistent with the delicacy of a lady, even to witness the indecorums, which are practised there; especially, when the performers of equestrian feats are of our own sex. To see a woman depart so far from the female character, as to assume the masculine habit and attitudes; and appear entirely indifferent, even to the externals of modesty, is truly disgusting, and ought not to be countenanced by our attendance, much less by our approbation.

**Related Characters:** Miss Lucy Freeman/Mrs. Lucy Sumner (speaker), Miss Eliza Wharton

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 92

**Explanation and Analysis**

This passage appears in one of Lucy's letters to Eliza, and it reflects the popular notions of womanhood in early American society. Lucy tells Eliza that she has recently been to the circus, and she disapproves of the female performers who ride horseback. During the 1700s, women typically rode sidesaddle, which means they sat aside rather than astride a horse. The women in the circus presumably don't ride sidesaddle, and Lucy finds this behavior masculine and offensive. She considers it immodest to straddle a horse and believes that women should always present themselves with decorum and restraint.

Lucy's condemnation of the circus women also lends insight into her opinion of Eliza's behavior. Eliza's coquettish behavior is not, in Lucy's eyes, becoming of a proper lady, and it is very similar to Major Sanford's own rakish behavior. In this way, Eliza too assumes a "masculine habit and attitude," and she shows little modesty or restraint. Lucy's aside about the circus women is really a passive aggressive way of telling Eliza that she thinks Eliza's own behavior is "truly disgusting" and not fit for their society. Like Mrs. Richman and Julia, Lucy uses her friendship with Eliza to try to force her to conform to their patriarchal society's strict definition of a woman, and in doing so, she frequently insults and degrades Eliza.

## Letter 61 Quotes

❝ Slight not the opinion of the world. We are dependent beings; and while the smallest traces of virtuous sensibility remain, we must feel the force of that dependence, in a greater or less degree. No female, whose mind is uncorrupted, can be indifferent to reputation. It is an inestimable jewel, the loss of which can never be repaired. While retained, it affords conscious peace to our own minds, and ensures the esteem and respect of all around us.

**Related Characters:** Miss Lucy Freeman/Mrs. Lucy Sumner (speaker), Major Peter Sanford

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 111

**Explanation and Analysis**

This quote is from another one of Lucy's letters to Eliza in which she lectures Eliza about her relationship with Major Sanford, a confessed libertine and rake. This quote underscores the importance of virtue in post-Revolutionary American society, and it also illustrates the connection between sex and virtue and morality. As a womanizing rake, Sanford has a loose reputation, sexually speaking, and it is assumed that he has seduced numerous women. Sex out of wedlock is considered debauched and immoral in 1797, and when Eliza begins to spend time with Sanford, her own reputation and virtue begin to suffer.

Lucy's comment that she and Eliza "are dependent beings" is a direct reference to their patriarchal society. As women, they are expected to marry and enter the domestic sphere, which literally makes them dependent upon men. If the men in polite society think that Eliza's virtue has been lost to Sanford, she will be considered damaged goods, and no one will want to marry her. Therefore, Lucy believes one's virtue and reputation to be "an inestimable jewel," as it can make or break a woman's entire future. This narrow view of virtue and the power it has to control Eliza's life and choices is evidence of her sexist society, and it also sheds light on her decision to run away at the end of the novel. Once Eliza really is seduced by Sanford and becomes pregnant, she has no reason to believe that her friends and greater society will ever accept her again. Lucy clearly says that once the "jewel" is lost, it "can never be repaired," and, as such, Eliza runs and subsequently dies alone, far from those who care about her.

## Letter 66 Quotes

❝ Indeed, I feared some immediate and fatal effect. I therefore seated myself beside her; and assuming an air of kindness, compose yourself, Eliza, said I; I repeat what I told you before, it is the purest friendship, which thus interests me in your concerns. This, under the direction of charity, induces me again to offer you my hand. Yet you have erred against knowledge and reason; against warning and counsel. You have forfeited the favor of your friends; and reluctant will be their forgiveness. I plead guilty, said she, to all your charges. From the general voice I expect no clemency. If I can make my peace with my mother, it is all I seek or wish on this side the grave.

**Related Characters:** Miss Julia Granby (speaker), Major Peter Sanford, Miss Eliza Wharton, Miss Lucy Freeman/Mrs. Lucy Sumner

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 120

**Explanation and Analysis**

This quote occurs in a letter Julia writes to Lucy, and it outlines a conversation Julia had with Eliza about her relationship with Major Sanford. This quote illustrates Julia's harsh judgement of Eliza's flirtatious behavior, but it also, like Lucy's sanctimonious lecture, only serves to push Eliza further away. Julia claims that she comes to Eliza from a place of "pure friendship" in her concern for Eliza's wellbeing, but she proves to be intolerant and unyielding. Eliza has been exceedingly depressed and in failing health, and while Julia doesn't know it, she is also pregnant. Eliza needs the comfort and support of her friends now more than ever, but Julia continues to criticize her, even when she suspects Eliza isn't well and fears a "fatal effect." Eliza looks as if she could conceivably be dying, and Julia is still more concerned with her reputation.

Julia, too, is condescending. She claims her concern for Eliza is "charity," which not only makes Eliza appear as if she *needs* her charity, but it also implies that she wants to help Eliza simply to do good (because this is expected of her) rather than to aid a struggling friend. She describes Eliza's relationship with Sanford as if it is a mortal sin that can never be forgiven, and since Eliza has acted in direct opposition to her friends' advice, they are unlikely to forgive her—even though Eliza's relationship with Sanford doesn't directly affect them. In this way, Julia implies that her friendship is only secure if Eliza does what she says and follows her advice. Julia directly tells Eliza that her friends' forgiveness will be "reluctant," so she has no reason to believe they will ever forgive her the transgression of her pregnancy. In this way, Eliza's friends, who should support and empower her, bolster the ideals of their patriarchal society. When Eliza resists the patriarchy through avoiding marriage and dating Sanford, her friends attempt to push her back toward patriarchal ideals in order to save face and maintain her virtue in the eyes of society.

## Letter 69 Quotes

❝ Should it please God to spare and restore me to health, I shall return, and endeavor, by a life of penitence and rectitude, to expiate my past offences. But should I be called from this scene of action; and leave behind me a helpless babe, the innocent sufferer of its mother's shame, Oh, Julia, let your friendship for me extend to the little stranger! Intercede with my mother to take it under her protection; and transfer to it all her affection for me; to train it up in the ways of piety and virtue, that it may compensate her for the afflictions which I have occasioned!

**Related Characters:** Miss Eliza Wharton (speaker), Mrs. M. Wharton, Miss Julia Granby

**Related Themes:**

**Related Symbols:**

**Page Number:** 131

**Explanation and Analysis**

This quote occurs in the very last letter Eliza writes to Julia before Eliza runs off to Danvers, and it illustrates the shame Eliza feels regarding her coquettish behavior and her relationship with Major Sanford. This quote also suggests that Eliza is terminally ill (in addition to being pregnant) and that she doesn't expect to live. Eliza's health begins to decline with subtle symptoms by the middle of the novel—she complains of fatigue and headaches and is often "indisposed"—but she never talks specifically about her physical health. Eliza intimates to Julia that she has tuberculosis, and while this is never confirmed, Eliza clearly senses that her life is nearing its end.

Obviously, Eliza is worried that she will leave her child without a mother, and since she is not married, without a proper family. In the eighteenth-century, the children of fallen women presumed to be immoral and lacking virtue also suffered the scorn of society. As illegitimate, these children were painted with the same brush as their mothers, and this harsh reality is adding to Eliza's stress. She asks Julia to make sure her child is brought up with "piety and virtue," which reflects Eliza's guilt over losing her own. Still, Eliza isn't a bad person and she certainly isn't immoral or lacking virtue in any other way, and it is exceedingly harsh that she has been shunned and that her child will probably suffer the same fate. This illustrates both the relationship between sex and virtue in early American society and the oppression of women. Society's punishment of Eliza for failing to conform to patriarchal ideals will follow her to the grave, and likely will transfer to her child.

## Letter 70 Quotes

❝ [Eliza] is exceedingly depressed; and says she neither expects nor wishes to survive her lying in. Insanity, for aught I know, must be my lot, if she should die. But I will not harbor the idea. I hope, one time or other, to have the power to make her amends, even by marriage. My wife may be provoked, I imagine, to sue for a divorce. If she should, she would find no difficulty in obtaining it; and then I would take Eliza in her stead. Though I confess that the idea of being thus connected with a woman whom I have been able to dishonor would be rather hard to surmount. It would hurt even my delicacy, little as you may think me to possess, to have a wife whom I know to be seducible. And, on this account, I cannot be positive that even Eliza would retain my love.

**Related Characters:** Major Peter Sanford (speaker), Mrs. Nancy Sanford, Miss Eliza Wharton, Mr. Charles Deighton

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 132

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote is from another of Sanford's letters to Charles, and it illustrates Eliza's illness and Sanford's continued love for her, but it also underscores the double standard women face in early America's sexist and patriarchal society. Eliza's reputation and virtue, and therefore her marriage prospects and entire life, are ruined because of her relationship with Sanford. She is punished harshly by patriarchal society for straying from the path of expected righteousness, but Sanford isn't likewise punished for the same offense. Sure, Sanford's reputation is poor within polite society, especially with self-righteous and pious women like Lucy and Julia, but otherwise, he is relatively unaffected. Sanford was still able to marry a wealthy woman and buy a respectable home, and the men in society essentially forgive his transgressions because he is a man of the upper class.

The fact that Eliza is punished, and Sanford isn't, is a product of their patriarchal society. There are separate standards of conduct imposed by society to rob women of power and independence, and Eliza is all but finished. In her fallen state, even Sanford won't consent to marry her, and he is the one responsible for her fall. Sanford deeply loves Eliza and he would like to marry her, but he sacrifices this love and potential happiness to keep up appearances. In this way, Sanford would rather be miserable than risk further damaging his own reputation with a known immoral woman, and this illustrates how strong the patriarchal hold is on post-Revolutionary American society.

## Letter 71 Quotes

❝ I foresee, my dear Mrs. Sumner, that this disastrous affair will suspend your enjoyments, as it has mine. But what are our feelings, compared with the pangs which rend a parent's heart? This parent, I here behold, inhumanly stripped of the best solace of her declining years, by the ensnaring machinations of a profligate debauchee! Not only the life, but what was still dearer, the reputation and virtue of the unfortunate Eliza, have fallen victims at the shrine of *libertinism!* Detested be the epithet! Let it henceforth bear its true signature, and candor itself shall call it *lust* and *brutality!*

**Related Characters:** Mrs. M. Wharton, Miss Eliza Wharton, Miss Lucy Freeman/Mrs. Lucy Sumner

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 137

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears in Julia's letter to Lucy when she first tells her about Eliza's death in Danvers, and it illustrates Julia's sanctimonious disapproval of Eliza's life and choices, but it also lends insight into Eliza's friendships. Here, Julia appears selfish and unsympathetic regarding the death of her dear friend. She is concerned that Eliza's death will "suspend [Lucy's] enjoyments" as it has suspended her own, but she says nothing of the suspension of Eliza's enjoyments when she was alive. She goes on to lament Mrs. Wharton's pain, and still says nothing of the pain Eliza undoubtedly felt. Julia ignores Eliza's feelings in her death just as she did when she was alive.

In this quote, Eliza is not only a disgrace who has sacrificed her own virtue, but she is an ungrateful child who has "stripped" her mother "of the best solace of her declining years" by sullying their family name with licentious sex. Eliza was a good and loyal daughter to her mother, she treated her with respect and loved her dearly; however, Julia's harsh critique of Eliza's behavior negates all other good and virtuous qualities Eliza has and leaves her a "profligate debauchee" full of "lust" and "brutality!" Again, if Julia ever really cared for Eliza, she would support her, even in disgrace and death.

## Letter 73 Quotes

❝ How sincerely I sympathize with the bereaved parent of the dear, deceased Eliza, I can feel, but have not power to express. Let it be her consolation, that her child is at rest. The resolution which carried this deluded wanderer thus far from her friends, and supported her through her various trials, is astonishing! Happy would it have been, had she exerted an equal degree of fortitude in repelling the first attacks upon her virtue! But she is no more; and heaven forbid that I should accuse or reproach her!

**Related Characters:** Miss Lucy Freeman/Mrs. Lucy Sumner (speaker), Mrs. M. Wharton, Miss Eliza Wharton, Miss Julia Granby

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 140

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote appears in Lucy's letter to Julia after Lucy first learns of Eliza's death, and it reflects the same judgmental disapproval as Julia's letter. Lucy too stops to sympathize with Mrs. Wharton, but she fails to sympathize with Eliza. Lucy assumes that Eliza is at rest, and this is a comforting thought, but she doesn't really know this. Eliza died alone, far away from the comfort of her friends and family. While the owners of the inn claim she died peacefully, this does not mean her soul is at rest. After all, according to Lucy and Julia, when Eliza was alive, she was on a fast-track to eternal damnation.

Lucy speaks of "the resolution which carried this deluded wanderer" far from her friends, but she fails to see that the "resolution" that carried Eliza was not necessarily her guilt or shame, but the judgmental scorn and rejection of her friends, who should have supported and comforted her. Lucy implies that Eliza didn't have the strength to protect her virtue, which suggests that Eliza's virtue was weak or lacking in the first place. Lucy vows not to "accuse or reproach" Eliza in her death, but she says this after she has already been critical of her. For being such a dear friend, Lucy doesn't appear to have a very high opinion of Eliza, and like Julia, Lucy treats Eliza just as badly in death as she did in life.

❝ Upon your reflecting and steady mind, my dear Julia, I need not inculcate the lessons which may be drawn from this woe-fraught tale; but for the sake of my sex in general, I wish it engraved upon every heart, that virtue alone, independent of the trappings of wealth, the parade of equipage, and the adulation of gallantry, can secure lasting felicity. From the melancholy story of Eliza Wharton, let the American fair learn to reject with disdain every insinuation derogatory to their true dignity and honor. Let them despise, and for ever banish the man, who can glory in the seduction of innocence and the ruin of reputation. To associate, is to approve; to approve, is to be betrayed!

**Related Characters:** Miss Lucy Freeman/Mrs. Lucy Sumner (speaker), Major Peter Sanford, Miss Eliza Wharton, Miss Julia Granby

**Related Themes:**

**Page Number:** 141

### Explanation and Analysis

This quote also occurs in Lucy's last letter to Julia, and it too suggests that Lucy never really knew Eliza very well despite their close friendship. Lucy wants to turn Eliza's story into a cautionary tale for the "sake" of women, so they will know how important it is to protect their virtue. Without virtue, Lucy claims, a woman will never be happy, no matter how wealthy or handsome her husband may be. Lucy wants to hold up "the melancholy story of Eliza Wharton" as an example of what happens when a woman surrenders her virtue to coquetry, but this is exactly how Eliza does not want to be remembered. She wants to be remembered for who she really was—a cheerful and loyal friend and daughter.

Foster presents the character of Eliza Wharton in a very sympathetic way, while she paints Eliza's judgmental friends in a much less flattering light. In this vein, Foster seems to suggest that the real cautionary tale is what can happen when women don't support each other. Eliza is resistant to her sexist and oppressive society from the beginning, and she desperately tries to live a life of her own choosing. Instead of supporting and empowering Eliza, her friends are overly harsh and push her to conform to patriarchal ideals of womanhood. Lucy, Julia, and Mrs. Richman support and reinforce the patriarchy far more than the men do in The Coquette, and it is in this way that Foster urges women to support and encourage one another and to stop being so judgmental. In Eliza's "woe-fraught tale," she is oppressed by the women as well as the men, and Foster calls for solidarity.

## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

### LETTER I. TO MISS LUCY FREEMAN.

Miss Eliza Wharton writes a letter to her dear friend, Lucy. Eliza's fiancé, Mr. Haly, has recently passed away, and she has suffered some depression because of it. Mr. Haly was "a man of real and substantial merit," and his death has been "deeply" mourned, but Eliza did not love him. She only agreed to marry him due to her "implicit obedience to the will and desires of [her] parents."

*Eliza's arranged marriage is evidence of her oppression as a woman in eighteenth-century America. She has little control over her life (including whom she marries), and she has little room to protest. Eliza is "implicitly obedient" in her social position, which her parents and broader society have instilled in her.*

Eliza does not, however, "rejoice in [Mr. Haly's] death." She felt for him "the sincerest friendship and esteem," but now that he is gone, she wants to enjoy life and have fun. Eliza feels "pleasure"—an "unusual sensation"—at leaving her parents' home and visiting friends in New Haven. Happiness is the only emotion she "wish[es] to cultivate."

*Eliza's "unusual sensation" of "pleasure" again reflects her oppression. As Eliza's feelings are rarely considered in decisions affecting her life, she has had rare occasion to feel pleasure in the past. Now, in her new freedom, Eliza wants to preserve this feeling for as long as possible.*

### LETTER II. TO THE SAME.

"My friends, here, are the picture of conjugal felicity," Eliza writes of General and Mrs. Richman. Eliza is having a wonderful time in New Haven, and she can feel the return of her "accustomed vivacity." Eliza has been removed from "the gay world" for some time now, but she can feel her "natural propensity for mixing in the busy scenes and active pleasures of life returning."

*The marriage of General and Mrs. Richman is Foster's prototype for a happy and successful marriage, and this is reflected in Eliza's description of their "conjugal felicity." Eliza* should, *according to society, pursue the same type of union, but she would rather have an active social life.*

"I have received your letter," Eliza writes to Lucy, "your moral lecture rather; and be assured, my dear, your monitorial lessons and advice shall be attended to." Eliza promises that she will no longer behave, as Lucy puts it, in a "*coquettish*" way; however, Eliza thinks her behavior deserves a "softer appellation." Her actions come "from an innocent heart, and are the effusions of youthful, and cheerful mind."

*Society views Eliza's friendly and flirtatious behavior as inappropriate and unbecoming a lady. Lucy obviously does not approve either and has taken to lecturing Eliza about her "coquettish," or flirty, behavior. Coquetry is also associated with sexual promiscuity, of which Lucy finds Eliza suspect. Eliza, however, considers her behavior "innocent" and sees nothing untoward in platonic friendships with men.*

## LETTER III. TO THE SAME.

Eliza writes Lucy again to speak of her "conquests." "Or must I enjoy them in silence?" Eliza asks. Yesterday, Eliza had gone to visit some neighbors, and there she met a man named Boyer. Boyer comes from a "worthy family" and studied divinity, and he will soon be moving to Hampshire to minister at one of the first parishes there. They had a pleasant evening together, and Eliza couldn't be happier. "Fortune, indeed, has not been very liberal of her gifts to me," Eliza writes, "but I presume on a large stock in the bank of friendship, which, united with health and innocence, give me some pleasing anticipation of future felicity."

*As Lucy has recently called Eliza a coquette, Eliza isn't sure she should tell her friend about the men in her life. While Lucy is sure to approve of a man like Boyer, Eliza's question indirectly addresses Lucy's judgmental behavior. Eliza expects her friend to be critical, and as such she considers concealing things from her. Eliza's comment about her meager fortune and "large stock in the bank of friendship" are a reference to the importance of friendship, but they also underscore Eliza's preoccupation with wealth and money and her desire to be upwardly mobile.*

## LETTER IV. TO MR. SELBY.

"Am I in pursuit of truth, or lady?" Reverend Boyer writes to his friend, Mr. Selby. "I answer both." His "respectable circle of acquaintances," with whom he has spent much time in New Haven, have introduced him to Miss Eliza Wharton, "a young lady whose elegant person, accomplished mind, and polished manners have been much celebrated."

*Boyer's question of "truth" or "lady" suggests that he is looking for a woman who is both attractive and virtuous, and if Eliza can be judged by the company she keeps, he believes he has found her. His description of Eliza as intelligent and refined is in keeping with popular notions of a proper lady.*

Boyer is not "ashamed to rank [himself] among the professed admirers of this lovely fair one." Boyer's intentions are pure, and he expects to soon "settle in an eligible situation." She is staying at General Richman's, and he and his wife, Mrs. Richman, are "warm in her praises" but claim "she is naturally of a gay disposition." This makes little difference to Boyer, as long as "there is discretion sufficient for its regulation." After all, a "cheerful wife" offers a nice balance to the "studious and sedentary life" of a preacher.

*The "eligible situation" Boyer speaks of is marriage, and he is looking at Eliza as a potential wife. Boyer must "rank" himself among her "admirers," which is to say she has many, and this is in keeping with her flirtatious behavior. The fact that Boyer initially views Eliza's "gay disposition" (her social exuberance) as a positive point is an important distinction to make, as he later cites this behavior as a reason not to marry her.*

Boyer has had many occasions to speak to Eliza, and he has found her to have an "elevated mind, a ready apprehension, and an accurate knowledge of the various subjects which have been brought into view." He has not yet spoken of love, a subject "she seems studiously to avoid," but he plans to speak of it soon. The General and Mrs. Richman have invited him to visit today, "as if by accident," and when he arrives, they will be on their way out and will "refer [him] to Miss Wharton for entertainment, till their return." Boyer is quite looking forward to it and "counting the hours, nay, the very moments" until he is in Eliza's company.

*Eliza has been brought up specifically to be attractive to men like Boyer, and he finds her particularly enticing. The ideal woman is educated and well-read, yet still dependent on men, and this is reflected in Eliza's "ready apprehension." Eliza avoids the subject of love because she is not interested in marriage, but her friends, who are aware of this, don't respect her wishes. Here, Eliza's friends go behind her back and encourage Boyer's infatuation.*

## LETTER V. TO MISS LUCY FREEMAN.

"I am so pestered with these admirers," Eliza writes Lucy. Since arriving in New Haven, Eliza has been "followed, flattered, and caressed," but the only "serious lover" worth mentioning is Reverend Boyer. He has given Eliza much attention, although he has said nothing of his intentions. Eliza herself has "studiously avoided every kind of discourse which might lead to this topic" and does not wish for a serious relationship with any man, especially one she "cannot repulse and does not intend to encourage." To Eliza, Boyer brings "a deceased friend to mind" and makes her "pensive."

*To Eliza, Boyer is too much like Mr. Haly, whom she did not love, and this causes her to hesitate. Eliza doesn't want to encourage Boyer's attention because if he decides to pursue her, she will be unable to "repulse" (or reject) him. He is precisely the type of man her patriarchal society expects her to marry, and like her engagement to Mr. Haly, Eliza will have little say in the matter.*

Mrs. Richman recently asked Eliza about Reverend Boyer. Eliza knows that Mrs. Richman is very fond of Boyer, and this is enough to make Eliza "partial to him." Mrs. Richman asked if Eliza's heart was "free," and Eliza reassured her it was and that she hoped it would stay that way. Mrs. Richman told Eliza that her friends are "solicitous for [her] welfare and wish to see [her] suitably and agreeably connected." Eliza is aware of this and told Mrs. Richman that she hopes her "friends will never again interpose in [her] concerns of that nature."

*Mrs. Richman's use of the word "free" is interesting. While Eliza's heart is free—that is, unattached—she certainly does not have the freedom to follow it wherever it may go. Instead, she will be forced, by way of her friends and society's expectations, to give her heart to Boyer, and Mrs. Richman's gentle prodding is the first step in that process. Here, Eliza expressly asks Mrs. Richman to stay out of her affairs, which she obviously does not do.*

Mrs. Richman knows as well as anyone that, had Mr. Haly lived, Eliza would have forfeited her own desires. "I am young, gay, volatile," Eliza told Mrs. Richman. "A melancholy event has lately extricated me from those shackles." Eliza "highly prizes" her newfound "freedom," and wants the "opportunity, unbiased by opinion, to gratify [her] natural disposition in a participation of those pleasures which youth and innocence afford."

*As Mrs. Richman knows Eliza so well and is a dear friend, she should be supportive of Eliza's desires to stay single. Eliza views marriage as oppressive, which is reflected in her reference to "shackles," and she would rather remain unattached and have the freedom to live for herself and simply enjoy life. This is the exact opposite of what she is expected to do—settle with a husband and family.*

"But beware, Eliza!" Mrs. Richman warned. Pursuing such freedoms may be tempting, but it is "a slippery, thorny path." Mrs. Richman spoke with "emphasis" and claimed freedom could lead to "wretchedness." When she wished Eliza a goodnight, Eliza did not reciprocate. "I despise those contracted ideas which confine virtue to a cell," Eliza writes Lucy. "I have no notion of becoming a recluse." Eliza has always considered Mrs. Richman a dear friend; however, she finds her "rather prudish."

*Mrs. Richman views Eliza's "freedom," or her tendency to flirt with multiple men, as being akin to sexual promiscuity, which Mrs. Richman equates with immorality. She fears that Eliza's "path" will forfeit her virtue, but Eliza has done nothing inappropriate to warrant such a mark on her virtue. For Eliza, true virtue is more than simply abstaining from sex.*

## LETTER VI. TO THE SAME.

Eliza again writes Lucy and tells her that she has been invited to attend a ball with Major Sanford, a man she does not know but seems "sufficiently respectable." She immediately accepted his invitation, but senses that the General and Mrs. Richman disapprove. When Eliza entered the parlor where the couple sat, they seemed "better pleased with each other than with [Eliza]," and they quickly left the room.

*General and Mrs. Richman's behavior implies that they consider themselves—the perfect married couple—above Eliza and her attraction to Sanford. Sanford has a reputation as a womanizer and the Richmans obviously disapprove. Eliza knows nothing of Sanford's reputation, but instead of warning Eliza, her friends avoid her and act superior.*

The General and Mrs. Richman are a "happy pair," Eliza tells Lucy, and if it is ever Eliza's "fate to wear the hymenial chain," she hopes to have a similar marriage. The General and Mrs. Richman have "health and wealth," and every other "attendant blessing." The couple has been very supportive of Eliza's social life thus far; although Mrs. Richman's "present circumstances render her fond of retirement." Eliza does not know why the Richmans appear to disapprove of her date with Sanford, and their scorn gives her "pain," but she will "apply the chymical powers of friendship and extract the secret from Mrs. Richman tomorrow, if not before."

*Again, General and Mrs. Richman are the consummate married couple and are the example Eliza is expected follow. They appear to be supportive of Eliza's social life* only *if she lives it the way they see fit—otherwise they avoid and alienate her. Eliza shouldn't have to use "chemical powers" to extract Mrs. Richman's opinion; as a friend, she should openly express it—especially if Mrs. Richman is concerned that Sanford is bad for Eliza.*


## LETTER VII. TO MR. SELBY.

"Divines need not declaim, not philosophers expatiate on the disappointments of human life!" Reverend Boyer writes to Mr. Selby. Boyer had been so excited at the prospect of spending more time with Eliza, but recent events have left him "dashed with the bitter rankings of jealousy and suspicion." When Boyer went to the General and Mrs. Richman's for his "accidental" visit with Eliza, he found Major Sanford waiting on Eliza as well. When she entered the room with "a brilliance of appearance and gaiety of manner" he had never noticed before, he became flustered and "forgot to sit down again." Boyer stood awkwardly "transfixed by the pangs of disappointment."

*The encouragement of General and Mrs. Richman have made Boyer feel as if he has some claim to Eliza, and he becomes instantly jealous seeing her with Sanford. While he found Eliza attractive before, Boyer didn't realize just how beautiful until he sees her with another man. In the company of Sanford, Eliza's "gaiety of manner" is on full display, and Boyer clearly fears that she is a coquette, which implies she is lacking morals and therefore not an appropriate woman to marry.*


Reverend Boyer asks Mrs. Richman if Major Sanford's character is "unexceptionable." Surely, Eliza, "a lady of delicacy," would not spend time "with an immoral, not to say profligate man." Mrs. Richman claims that Sanford's "rank and fortune" make him a respectable man, but she doesn't like the idea of Eliza spending time with him. She claims Eliza knows nothing of Sanford, and her acceptance of his invite was mere "juvenile indiscretion." Mrs. Richman warns that they must look on Eliza's behavior with "a candid eye," and she reminds Boyer that "faults, not foibles, require the severity of censure."

*Boyer questions Eliza's virtue because of her association with Sanford, a man he suspects is a womanizer and therefore morally and sexually corrupt. Sanford is a wealthy man, which makes him respected in the eyes of society, but Mrs. Richman finds his promiscuity undesirable and morally dangerous. As Eliza doesn't know of his reputation, she is thus far still innocent and not worthy of "censure" (or their disapproval and criticism).*

## LETTER VIII. TO MR. CHARLES DEIGHTON.

Major Sanford writes his friend, Charles Deighton, and tells him of his date with Eliza, "a young lady whose agreeable person, polished manners, and refined talents have rendered her the toast of the country." She is staying with her friend and cousin, Mrs. Richman, in New Haven, although Mrs. Richman watches Eliza "with a jealous eye." Sanford suspects Eliza is "a coquette." If she is, Sanford writes, "I shall avenge my sex, by retaliating the mischiefs, she mediates against us." Sanford's intentions are not of an "ill design," he only wishes to "play off [Eliza's] own artillery, by using a little unmeaning gallantry. And let her beware of the consequences."

*Sanford implies that Mrs. Richman is envious of Eliza's social freedom. As the poster woman for eighteenth-century marriage, Mrs. Richman is not allowed to behave in such a free and open way, and she appears to resent Eliza for it. Sanford is not put off by Eliza's coquetry, and since Sanford is himself a libertine, he considers it all in good fun. "The consequences" Sanford mentions are that Eliza stands to be socially ostracized for entering a relationship with him, but he cares very little if Eliza's reputation is tarnished.*

## LETTER IX. TO MISS LUCY FREEMAN.

Eliza writes Lucy to tell her of the previous day's excitement. Yesterday, just as Major Sanford arrived to take Eliza to the ball, Reverend Boyer called for a surprise visit. Eliza "blushed and stammered" in Boyer's presence, though she doesn't understand why. While she certainly "respects and esteems" Reverend Boyer, "these are calm passions" that do not elicit such reaction. Furthermore, she was not aware "of any impropriety of conduct" which would make her feel ashamed. Her date with Major Sanford was surely not inappropriate and he is "a man of fortune, fashion, and for ought [Eliza] knew, of unblemished character." Reverend Boyer, however, seemed "disconcerted" with Major Sanford's presence.

*Eliza doesn't feel like her behavior is inappropriate because it isn't. She is merely getting to know Sanford, a man of style and high social standing. Boyer is obviously "disconcerted" because he fancies Eliza a potential wife and he is jealous that she is spending time with another man; however, Eliza's behavior suggests that she is more attracted to Boyer than she admits. She doesn't want to be attracted to him—he represents marriage and oppression—yet she "blushes."*

Eliza had a lovely time with Sanford at the ball, and he had asked to see her again in the morning. It is now almost breakfast, and Eliza is sure he will be arriving soon. Last night, when Eliza returned home, she found the General and Mrs. Richman waiting in the parlor. Mrs. Richman asked how Eliza liked Sanford, and Eliza responded that she found him to be "a finished gentleman." Eliza asked Mrs. Richman if she agreed, and she claimed she did not. "No, my dear," Mrs. Richman said, "in my opinion, he falls far below it; since he is deficient in one of the great essentials of the character, and that is, *virtue*."

*Eliza's friends appear eager to warn her about Sanford's reputation; however, it is strange that they wait until* after *Eliza's date. Mrs. Richman had the opportunity to warn Eliza when she ignored her in the parlor the day before, yet she didn't. If Mrs. Richman is truly concerned about Eliza's reputation and virtue (and not merely looking for another reason to criticize her), she surely would have warned her sooner.*

"Must I then become an avowed prude at once; and refuse him admission, if [Major Sanford] call, in compliance with the customary forms?" Eliza asked Mrs. Richman. "By no means," Mrs. Richman responded, but Eliza must be careful. "A man of Major Sanford's art can easily distinguish between a forbidding, and an encouraging reception," she warned. Eliza tells Lucy that she is "astonished" and "mortified." She enjoys Major Sanford's company, "but virtue and prudence forbid it."

*Mrs. Richman implies that Sanford can discern between women he can seduce and women he can't, and she insinuates that Sanford believes he can seduce Eliza, otherwise he would not have taken her to the ball. This is a direct insult to Eliza's virtue, something society tells her must be protected.*

## LETTER X. TO THE SAME.

Eliza again writes Lucy and tells her that Major Sanford was waiting for her in the parlor when she went downstairs after closing her last letter. They engaged in pleasant conversation, and Sanford told her that he was considering buying an estate in Eliza's native town. Sanford soon left, and Eliza dressed for an engagement with Mrs. Richman to dine at Mr. Laurence's, a local gentleman of "fortune and fashion." His daughter, Miss Laurence, is heiress to their large estate, and while she is lovely, Eliza admits that her expressions "indicates not much soul."

*Sanford only want to buy a house in Eliza's hometown of Hartford, CT so he can continue to pursue her after she leaves New Haven, which shows just how far Sanford will go to seduce a conquest. Eliza's mention of Miss Laurence is ironic, as, unbeknownst to her, Sanford has been in talks with Mr. Laurence to secure Miss Laurence's hand in marriage.*

## LETTER XI. TO MR. CHARLES DEIGHTON.

"Well, Charles," Sanford writes, "I have been manœuvring to day, a little revengefully." He had gone to see Eliza earlier that morning and sensed that she was "vexed." No doubt Mrs. Richman has warned her "of the vices of her gallant," Sanford says. Eliza's coldness soon warmed, however, and they had a nice visit. Eliza "intimated" that she and Mrs. Richman would be going to Laurence's, and Sanford is "determined to follow them, and tease the jealous Mrs. Richman." If Sanford were partial to marriage, he believes that Eliza would make the perfect wife, "but this is no part of [his] plan, so long as [he] can keep out of the noose." If Sanford does "submit to be shackled," it will be out of the "necessity of mending [his] fortune."

*This is the first hint at the fact that Sanford's status as a wealthy man is a farce. Like Eliza, Sanford also considers marriage oppressive and this is reflected in his reference to marriage as a "noose." This reference implies that Sanford considers marriage a death of sorts, and he will only concede to marriage if the woman is sufficiently rich to resolve his mounting financial problems. Sanford knows that Mrs. Richman does not approve of his relationship with Eliza, and this only makes him want to pursue her more.*

## LETTER XII. TO MISS LUCY FREEMAN.

"The heart of your friend is again besieged," Eliza writes Lucy. "Sometimes I think of becoming a predestinarian, and submitting implicitly to fate, without any exercise of free will," Eliza says, "but as mine seems to be a wayward one, I would counteract the operations of it, if possible." Mrs. Richman told Eliza that Reverend Boyer would be calling this evening, and that she expects him to be as "attentive and sincere" as his last visit. "Your friends, Eliza," Mrs. Richman said, "would be very happy to see you united to a man of Mr. Boyer's worth." Eliza told Mrs. Richman that she is much too happy in her current life to think about marriage. "Marriage is the tomb of friendship," Eliza writes.

*Eliza's comment that she thinks "of becoming a predestinarian" is a reference to the patriarchal society in which she lives. As a woman, Eliza is "predestined" to marry and become domesticated, and she is expected to accept this "fate" without question or complaint. She knows it would be easier to just accept this, but she would rather live a life of her own choosing than bend to the sexist nature of her society. Eliza dreads getting married and sacrificing her social life, which is why she considers marriage "the tomb of friendship."*

When Eliza went down to dinner that evening, she found Reverend Boyer already waiting. After a nice dinner and pleasant conversation, they took a walk in the garden, where Boyer found the courage to "admit his addresses," and asked Eliza if it were possible for her to "reward his love." To Eliza, "this was a rather sudden affair" and she couldn't answer "without consideration." She asked Boyer to call on her again, and he suggested the next day. "O, not so soon," Eliza answered. "Next Monday, I believe will be early enough."

*The fact that Eliza wants extended time to decide if she will "reward [Boyer's] love," suggests that her feelings aren't nearly as strong as his. Boyer assumes she will only need the evening to consider their future, but Eliza wants several days. This apprehension is another reflection of Eliza's aversion to marriage—she attempts to avoid even talking about it whenever possible.*

## LETTER XIII. TO MISS ELIZA WHARTON.

"Methinks I can gather from your letters," Lucy writes Eliza, "a predilection for this Major Sanford. But he is a rake, my dear friend." Lucy reminds Eliza that a rake cannot be reformed, and that Reverend Boyer is a more respectable match. "His taste is undebauched," Lucy says, and "his station in life is, perhaps, as elevated as you have a right to claim." She asks Eliza to "forgive [her] plainness," but "it is the task of friendship, sometimes to tell disagreeable truths."

*Lucy's letters and lectures to Eliza are frequently harsh and offensive. Here, she warns Eliza about Sanford's reputation, which is appropriate enough, but she also implies that Eliza should marry Boyer because he is the best man that she will ever secure. As both Eliza and Boyer are middle-class, to implies that Eliza isn't good enough to pursue a wealthier man like Sanford, bad reputation or not.*

Lucy says that she knows Eliza's "ambition is to make a distinguished figure in the first class of polished society," but these are "fading honors." She encourages Eliza "to lay aside those coquettish airs which [she] sometimes put on," and remember that Boyer is not "a fop," but a man of "sense and honor." She implores her friend to act with "modest freedom" and "dignified unreserve."

*Here, Lucy directly addresses Eliza's desire to become upwardly mobile, and she basically tells her to forget it. To Lucy, Eliza should be more worried about her own reputation than securing a place in the upper class. Telling Eliza to "lay aside [her] coquettish airs" is another direct reference to Eliza's flirtatiousness.*

## LETTER XIV. TO MISS LUCY FREEMAN.

"This was the day fixed for deciding Mr. Boyer's cause," Eliza writes Lucy. He came to visit today, and after a bit of small talk, "he seemed eager to improve the opportunity to enter directly on the subject of his present visit." Eliza told Boyer that she had only just entered society, and she was in no rush to give it up. "I recoil at the thought of immediately forming a connection," Eliza told him, "which must confine me to the duties of domestic life." While Eliza is fond of Boyer, she told him he must not consider her "confined to [his] society, or obligated to a future connection." Reverend Boyer was obviously disappointed, but he asked Eliza to go riding the next day and she accepted.

*Eliza is more than clear to Boyer about her desire to remain single and tells him in no uncertain terms that she will not see him exclusively. Eliza is clear to* everyone *what her wishes are regarding marriage, but no one respects her opinions or desires. This complete indifference to Eliza's personal choices again reflects the oppression of her sexist and patriarchal society. Eliza is "predestined" to be a wife and mother, and it makes very little difference whether she actually wants to do this.*

After Reverend Boyer had gone, Mrs. Richman told Eliza that she "should own [herself] somewhat engaged to him," but Eliza told her that was something she couldn't do. Eliza is not yet ready to "resign [her] freedom," but Mrs. Richman claimed Eliza has the "wrong ideas of freedom" and marriage. "I hope that Mr. Boyer will happily rectify them," Mrs. Richman said.

*Eliza doesn't consider herself "free" if she can't make her own decisions (i.e. stay single or get married), but Mrs. Richman still isn't listening. As a friend, she should support and empower Eliza, but she continues to push her toward Boyer, even when Eliza explicitly asks her not to.*

## LETTER XV. TO MISS ELIZA WHARTON.

"I congratulate you, my dear Eliza," Lucy writes, "on the stability of your conduct towards Mr. Boyer," for a man of his "honor and good sense will never abridge any privileges which virtue can claim." She tells Eliza that Major Sanford has inquired about the sale of local house, and many in town see him as an "agreeable addition" to society. Lucy, however, is not convinced.

*Lucy is just as bad as Mrs. Richman; she, too, is well aware of Eliza's desire to stay single, but she also pushes for Boyer against Eliza's wishes. Lucy applauds "the stability" of Eliza's "conduct" with him—Eliza hasn't behaved coquettishly—which is condescending and patronizing and not remotely helpful to Eliza.*

For Major Sanford to be an agreeable addition to their society, his "principles and practice must be uncorrupted" and his morals reflective of "probity and honor." However, "if I mistake not," Lucy writes, "this gallant of yours cannot boast" these qualities. Lucy hopes that neither she nor Eliza will have much to do with him should he move to town. "But I shall not set up for a censor," Lucy says and closes her letter with talk of her fiancé and their upcoming nuptials.

*Lucy's comment that she "shall not set up for a censor" means that she won't criticize Sanford or Eliza—which, of course, isn't true. Lucy's entire letter is a criticism of Eliza's relationship with Sanford and is intended to convince her to marry Boyer to preserve her honor and morality. Lucy's entire letter assumes that Eliza is morally corrupt and in need of saving.*

## LETTER XVI. TO MISS LUCY FREEMAN.

"We go on charmingly here," Eliza writes Lucy, "almost as soft and smooth as your ladyship." Today, Reverend Boyer informed Eliza that he is leaving tomorrow for his new residence, where he will "put on the sacred bands." He asked to write Eliza, and she agreed, but told him not to "expect anything more than general subjects from [her]." As they spoke, they were interrupted by Major Sanford, whose presence "agreeably relieved" Eliza. "So sweet a repast, for several hours together," she says in reference to Boyer, "was rather sickening to my taste."

*This letter is quite passive aggressive. Eliza is obviously feeling judged by Lucy's last letter, which is why Eliza says that her own life is going nearly "as soft and smooth as your ladyship," as if Lucy's life is superior to Eliza's. The mention of Boyer's "sacred bands" could be a reference to his final vows as a preacher, but it is also a reference to marriage—he has bought a new house with the intention of soon getting married, as well.*

After Sanford left, Boyer asked Eliza "to give him some assurance of [her] constancy," but she "reminded him of the terms of [their] engagement." Boyer then "bid [Eliza] an affectionate adieu," he told her not to expect him for a few months. Eliza tells Lucy that she is not "greatly interested in the progress of the negotiation" with Boyer and is focused only on her friends.

*The fact that Boyer needs to be "reminded of the terms of their engagement" suggests that he doesn't respect Eliza or her wishes, and this is another reflection of their patriarchal society. It doesn't matter what Eliza wants; if Boyer wants to marry Eliza, she will have little recourse.*

## LETTER XVII. TO MR. SELBY.

Reverend Boyer again writes Mr. Selby and tells him about Eliza. The time Boyer has spent with her has been "some of the happiest hours of [his] life," but he has "not been able to infuse into her bosom the ardor which [he] feels in [his] own." He will leave tomorrow for his "solemn charge," and Eliza has agreed to write. Her correspondence, Boyer writes, will be "a source of pleasure which alone can atone for her absence."

*While Boyer is obviously falling for Eliza, he is very aware that she doesn't feel the same way. This realization makes the pressure he puts on her even worse. He knows that she doesn't want to get married, to* anyone, *but she especially does not love* him, *and yet he continues to ignore her feelings.*

## LETTER XVIII. TO MR. CHARLES DEIGHTON.

"This same Eliza, of whom I have told you," Sanford writes Charles, "has really made more impression on my heart, than I was aware of." She also has the attention of "a priest," and when Sanford saw them together, he "felt a glow of jealousy." However, Sanford has "a plan of necessity" to marry Miss Laurence. Her father, Mr. Laurence, is "a man of large property" and she an only child. Her family has "very much courted and caressed" Sanford, and he knows that they intend to "shackle" him in marriage.

*Just as Eliza has previously, Sanford refers to marriage as "shackles," which implies that he likens it to prison or slavery, and again illustrates his distaste for marriage. Surprisingly, Sanford is beginning to fall in love with Eliza (as much as he is capable), and this, in addition to his aversion to marriage, makes his necessity to marry for money plain and obviously urgent.*

While Sanford intends to marry Miss Laurence, he much prefers Eliza. "I know not the lady in the world with whom I would sooner form a connection of this sort than with Eliza Wharton. But it will never do." If either Sanford or Eliza had more money, he would "risk a union," but with things as they are, this is impossible. For now, Sanford wants to enjoy Eliza's company for "as long as possible," and while he can't have her, he "will not tamely see her the property of another."

*Even though Sanford is falling for Eliza, he cares little about her choices either. He has no intention of ever entering a formal relationship with Eliza—that is to say he won't marry her—but he doesn't want to see her with anyone else, either. His reference to Eliza as "property" again underscores her status as a woman; she is something to be owned and controlled.*

## LETTER XIX. TO MISS LUCY FREEMAN.

Eliza writes Lucy and tells her that Major Sanford approached her as she walked alone in the garden and "went on rhapsodically to declare his passion." He worried that Eliza was "forming a connection with Mr. Boyer, which would effectually destroy all his hopes of future happiness." He reminded Eliza of "the confinements" of Mr. Boyer's "profession," and asked if her "generous mind could submit to cares and perplexities like these." He presumed that Eliza preferred "a more elevated sphere of life," and while she didn't "approve his sentiments," her "ear was charmed with his rhetoric."

*Eliza doesn't "approve" of Sanford's talk of "passion," but she does approve of talks of money. Sanford suspects that Eliza is looking to be upwardly mobile, and Boyer's profession as a preacher doesn't pay very much money. Eliza will never climb to the upper class as the wife of a preacher, and Sanford is hoping that this will be enough to convince Eliza to reject Boyer's advances.*

Sanford asked Eliza if they might be friends and if she would allow him to visit occasionally, "as a brother, if no more?" Eliza told him she "was a pensioner of friendship," but her friends' poor opinion of Sanford has made her hesitant. "I plead guilty to the charge, madam," Sanford said finally, "which they have undoubtedly brought against me, of imprudence and folly in many particulars; yet of malignancy and vice I am innocent."

*Eliza's claim to be "a pensioner of friendship" again highlights her preoccupation with money. Also, Sanford's claim that he is "imprudent" but innocent of "vice" again implies that true virtue shouldn't be confined to mere chastity. Sanford may be sexually promiscuous, but he isn't* that bad *of a guy, he claims.*

"I hope you have been agreeably entertained," Mrs. Richman said to Eliza after Sanford left. "I did not choose my company, madam," Eliza said. "Nor," said Mrs. Richman, "did you refuse it, I presume." Eliza claimed she was only being hospitable and hoped that Mrs. Richman did not think her "an object of seduction." She told Eliza that she does not think her "seducible," but neither was "Richardson's Clarissa, till she made herself the victim, by her own indiscretion." Mrs. Richman again warned Eliza of Sanford's "arts," and recommended she "remember [her] engagement to Mr. Boyer." She instructed Eliza to let "sincerity and virtue be [her] guides," which are sure to lead to "happiness and peace."

*Again, Mrs. Richman is quite condescending, which continues to undermine her friendship with Eliza. Mrs. Richman's self-righteousness and her subtle implications that Eliza could be, or perhaps has been, seduced are the equivalent of eighteenth-century slut-shaming. To dissuade a continued relationship,she mentions* Clarissa, *an epistolary novel by Samuel Richardson in which the title character tries to reform a rake and subsequently dies. Plus, she urges Eliza to remember her "engagement" to Boyer; however, Eliza told Boyer exactly what she told Mrs. Richman—that she will not be confined to any man.*

## LETTER XX. TO MRS. M. WHARTON.

"At this time, my dear mamma," Eliza writes her mother, Mrs. Wharton, "I am peculiarly solicitous for your advice." Eliza tells her mother about Reverend Boyer's attention. "But his situation in life!" she says. "I dare not enter it." She tells her mother that while he "is not disagreeable to [her]," she would rather marry someone whose profession is "more comfortable to [her] tastes." Eliza tells her mother that they will talk more about Reverend Boyer later, as she will be returning home soon.

*This again reflects Eliza's desire to be upwardly mobile and move out of the middle class. Boyer's "situation in life" is that he doesn't have much money, and it is not presumed that he ever will. Eliza "dare not enter" the strict economy of Boyer's life, but she is growing fond of him. Eliza's "tastes" are rich, and she wants a wealthy man, like Sanford. Of course, Eliza has no idea that Sanford is actually broke.*

## LETTER XXI. TO MISS ELIZA WHARTON.

Mrs. Wharton was happy to hear from her daughter, and she writes back to tell Eliza that, in her own experience, life with a preacher was "replete with happiness." Preachers are much respected in society, Mrs. Wharton says, and reminds her daughter that happiness is "derived from ourselves." She asks Eliza to return home "as soon as politeness will allow."

*Foster implies that Eliza's father was also a preacher, which means that she has never had much money. Preachers make little money, but they also believe in prudence and strict economy, and they live very unadorned lives.*

## LETTER XXII. TO MISS ELIZA WHARTON.

"Your idea has been the solace of my retired moments," Reverend Boyer tells Eliza in his next letter. He has been thinking fondly of their time together, and he can't wait until they again meet. Boyer's friend, Mr. Selby, will deliver this letter. "May I solicit the favor of a line, through him, in return?" Boyer asks Eliza.

*Boyer's sending of Selby to deliver a letter to Eliza is Boyer's attempt to place a mole in Eliza's life, so that he may get additional information about her life and relationships with others. Boyer wants to marry Eliza, and he is obviously a jealous man.*

## LETTER XXIII. TO THE REV. J. BOYER.

"I have executed your commission," Mr. Selby writes Reverend Boyer, and "I think [Eliza] fully justifies your partiality to her." Selby tells Boyer that Eliza is very lovely, but he senses "coquetry" in her airs. When Selby arrived at General Richman's for dinner, Major Sanford was there as well as a Mr. Laurence and his family. Sanford, it appears to Selby, is "a man of show and fashion."

*Selby's remark that Sanford is a "man of show and fashion" is a reference to his class and wealth, which makes Boyer even more insecure. Selby's instant assessment that Eliza is a coquette again reflects their sexist society. Eliza can't be friendly with a man without others assuming that it is inappropriate.*

The dinner conversation soon turned to politics. Mrs. Richman and Eliza readily joined in, but Mrs. Laurence claimed she "never meddled with politics; she thought they did not belong to ladies." Miss Wharton and Mrs. Richman disagreed. They live in America too, Mrs. Richman said, and while they may not serve on the senate of the nation or "defend its rights," they are surely allowed to comment on it. "Why should government, which involves the peace and order of the society, of which we are a part, be wholly excluded from our observation?" Mrs. Richman asked. The men "applauded Mrs. Richman's sentiments as truly Roman; and what was more, they said, truly republican."

*This passage reflects both Eliza and Mrs. Richman's desire to be seen as equal to men. Popular eighteenth-century opinion dictated that women are incapable of serious conversation, especially about something as important as the new nation, but Mrs. Richman disagrees. Women aren't allowed to vote or serve in the government, and they certainly can't serve in the military, but she wants to at least be able to voice an opinion about the country in which she lives.*

## LETTER XXIV. TO THE REV. J. BOYER.

Mr. Selby resumes his letter to Reverend Boyer and encloses a letter from Eliza. He had gone to General Richman's around noon to retrieve Eliza's letter, and was surprised to find her on horseback with Major Sanford. They seemed surprised to see Selby as well, and Sanford refused Eliza's invitation to come in. Eliza and Selby were met at the door by General Richman, who laughed at Eliza for changing company.

*General Richman's joke that Eliza changed company on her date may just be a gentle ribbing, but this is subtle shaming, as well. He implies, and then laughs, that Eliza is promiscuous and that there is something untoward about the completely innocent (thus far) relationships she has been engaged in. While it might be funny, it is designed to control Eliza's behavior.*

Eliza claimed that her running into Major Sanford was "accidental." Last night she made plans with Miss Laurence to go riding, and they had simply come by Sanford in their travels. He asked to join them, and then Miss Laurence excused herself to dress for dinner, as they were all going to the assembly that evening. "I am going myself to the assembly this evening," Mr. Selby writes, "though I did not mention it."

*Miss Laurence excuses herself because, presumably, she is aware that her father is considering Sanford as her potential husband, and she has to watch him obviously try to woo and seduce Eliza. This is another example of their sexist, patriarchal society—Miss Laurence has little control over her life and fate either.*

## LETTER XXV. TO THE REV. J. BOYER.

"Sir," writes Eliza to Boyer, "I congratulate you on your agreeable settlement, and hope it will be productive of real and lasting happiness." She tells Boyer that she has enjoyed meeting his friend, Mr. Selby, and that they will be joining him soon for dinner. She expresses some excitement for her upcoming social engagements and asks Boyer if her "sprightly disposition" is, in his opinion, "indicative of a giddy mind, or an innocent heart." Eliza closes her letter by wishing him "health and happiness."

*Eliza's opening of "Sir" places her immediately at a distance. This rather stuffy beginning makes her relationship to Boyer seem formal or businesslike, and it doesn't impart any affection or romance. Eliza also hints at her coquetry, or "sprightly disposition," and off-handedly questions if he too considers it a mark upon her morals, or if he believes her behavior to be as "innocent" as she does.*

## LETTER XXVI. TO MISS LUCY FREEMAN.

"I am perplexed and embarrassed, my friend," Eliza writes Lucy, "by the assiduous attentions of this Major Sanford." Reverend Boyer's friend, Mr. Selby, had recently come to visit, and Sanford watched all of Mr. Selby's actions with attention that "seemed to boarder on anxiety." When Mr. Selby left, Sanford was "pensive and thoughtful," and tried to speak to Eliza alone; however, she avoided him.

*Sanford is clearly fonder of Eliza than she is of him, and this makes her uncomfortable. He is relentless, or "assiduous," in his attempts to court her, and this to reflects their patriarchal society—Eliza has asked Sanford to curb his advances and he completely disregards her and does as he pleases.*

Eliza agreed to go horseback riding the next day with Miss Laurence, and Major Sanford appeared just a few miles into the trip. He asked to join them, and they consented, but Miss Laurence was "rather nettled" by Sanford's "particular attention" to Eliza. Miss Laurence soon excused herself to dress for dinner. Sanford knew that Miss Laurence was planning on going to the assembly that evening with a Mr. Gordon, so he asked Eliza to accept his own invite and "form a party with them." Eliza agreed.

*Again, Miss Laurence is "rather nettled" because her father is considering Sanford as her husband, and Sanford is clearly partial to Eliza. Not only has Miss Laurence been denied the freedom of selecting her own husband, but she may be forced to marry a man that she knows has no interest in or attraction to her, and this is particularly disheartening.*

Once Miss Laurence was gone, Major Sanford told Eliza that he was struck with "jealousy" by the appearance of Reverend Boyer's friend, Mr. Selby. Eliza reminded Sanford that she is "under no special obligation to him," and does "not intend to form any immediate connection." As Eliza dressed for dinner, Mrs. Richman came to ask if Major Sanford would have "the honor of her hand this evening." Eliza confirmed he would, and Mrs. Richman warned her about "the slender prospect" of reforming a rake. She claimed Reverend Boyer would be a more suitable match, and Eliza told her she had not yet decided which man to choose. Her "fancy and judgement" of these men is "in scales," Eliza says. "Sometimes one preponderates, sometimes the other."

*Eliza's reference to "preponderating scales" again harkens to worth and value, which is in keeping with her preoccupation with money and wealth. Like Sanford, potential wealth is the only advantage to marriage Eliza can see, but she is relentlessly pursued and pressured to commit by everyone in her life. Mrs. Richman's contention that Eliza can't "reform a rake" implies that Sanford would never be faithful to her, and Boyer, a fine and moral man, would not present such problems.*

Is it not true that "*a reformed rake makes the best husband*?" Eliza asks Lucy. Eliza admits that she may be "too volatile for a confinement to domestic avocation and sedentary pleasures," but a relationship with Boyer does appeal to her in some respects. "But the idea of relinquishing those delightful amusements and flattering attentions, which wealth and equipage bestow, is painful," Eliza says. "Why are not the virtues of the one, and the graces and affluence of the other combined?"

*Eliza's comment that "a reformed rake makes the best husband" was a popular saying in the 1700s and it reflects the double standard present in society. Eliza's coquettish behavior has the potential to render her unmarriable by society's standards, but this is not true for Sanford as a rake. Sanford can sleep with as many women as he wants and still claim a virtuous wife, but Eliza does not enjoy the same privilege. Eliza also specifically mentions money in this passage. It pains her that those who are considered most virtuous and moral are often the poorest.*

## LETTER XXVII. TO THE REV. MR. BOYER.

"Every woman is at heart a rake," Mr. Selby writes to Reverend Boyer. Selby assumes that all women must be rakes to "account for the pleasure which they evidently receive from the society, the flattery, the caresses of men" like Major Sanford. Mr. Selby attended the assembly last night and became suspicious of Eliza's relationship with Sanford. He wants to believe that Eliza is as virtuous and good as her reputation suggests, but her behavior suggests otherwise. Selby begs Boyer not take offense at his candor—he simply does not wish to see his friend "made the dupe of a coquette."

*Selby's letter amounts to little more than eighteenth-century slut-shaming, and it plainly illustrates his sexist nature. He believes Eliza to be promiscuous simply because she is a woman and therefore can't control herself. Other than the fact that this claim is utterly ridiculous, Eliza has done nothing to warrant this charge, other than visit socially with Sanford, and this reflects the rigid standards of their patriarchal society.*

## LETTER XXVIII. TO MR. CHARLES DEIGHTON.

"I go on finely with my amour," Sanford writes Charles. Sanford knows that Eliza's friends do not approve of him, and he wonders why this alone is not enough to dissuade her interests. Despite their disapproval, Eliza *acts* as if she desires Sanford, and this encourages his behavior. He still worries that she is more interested in Reverend Boyer, however, and he plans to "detach her from him," which is sure to anger her friends as well and therefore serve a double purpose.

*Sanford is clearly a selfish man who cares about nothing but his own desires. He knows that he is damaging to Eliza's reputation, he simply doesn't care. He cares so little, in fact, that he is prepared to sabotage her relationship with Boyer in order to get what he wants. For Boyer, irritating and offending Eliza's prudish, self-righteous friends is merely a perk.*

"I have not yet determined to seduce [Eliza]," Sanford tells Charles, although he doesn't believe it would be difficult to do so. If Sanford does have sex with Eliza, he says, "she can blame none but herself." She knew that he was a rake before she consented to their relationship, and as such, Eliza has "no reason to wonder" that Sanford "will act consistently with" this reputation. "If she will play with a lion," Sanford writes, "let her beware of his paw."

*This too reflects the sexist nature of their patriarchal society. If Eliza's reputation is ruined, Sanford does not bear any of the responsibility. He is free to move on to his next conquest while Eliza suffers the consequences. According to Sanford, that is no one's fault but Eliza's since she knew the risks beforehand. Therefore, if Eliza is hit with his "paw," it is not Sanford's fault.*

## LETTER XXIX. TO MISS ELIZA WHARTON.

"Let not the magic arts of that worthless Sanford lead you, like an *ignis fatuus* from the path of rectitude and virtue!" Lucy Freeman writes Eliza. She tells Eliza that a rake can never be reformed; however, even if Eliza could reform Sanford, she should still reject him because his debauchery and lack of "virtue" are offenses "no degree of repentance can wholly efface."

*An "ignis fatuus" is a reference to an old folktale about a phantom light that leads travelers astray, and Lucy likewise suggests that Sanford is leading Eliza away from virtuousness. Lucy claims that Sanford can never repent for his lack of virtue, which is to say, indirectly, that Eliza won't be able to either.*

Lucy questions how Eliza, a woman "used to serenity and order in family" who is also so "refined," could so easily "relinquish" these qualities for a "whirlpool of frivolity" and "licentious wit." Lucy reminds Eliza that her happiness in this world and the next relies on her behavior. "Reverse the scene," Lucy warns.

*Again, Lucy's lecture is incredibly degrading and critical. She implies that Eliza is too good for her current behavior and that her morality is suffering. It is ridiculous to assume that Eliza is immoral simply because she is friendly with Sanford, but Lucy implies that Eliza is headed for eternal damnation.*

## LETTER XXX. TO MISS LUCY FREEMAN.

Eliza writes to Lucy and informs her that she has "renounced [Sanford] entirely." In compliance with her friends wishes, Eliza told Sanford on his last visit that his pursuit of her must "for ever cease," and after much objection, Sanford left town to take possession of his new home in Eliza's own native city. While Eliza has "terminated the affair" with Sanford, she is rather disappointed. "His liberal fortune was extremely alluring to me," Eliza writes, "who, you know, have been hitherto confined to the rigid rules of prudence and economy, not to say, necessity in my finances."

*Foster has implied that Eliza's father was a preacher like Boyer, and as such, Eliza has never enjoyed wealth or luxury. She saw Sanford as a way to realize this dream and rise to a higher class standing, but it appears as though she will now become a preacher's wife, a particularly daunting idea to Eliza no doubt. Sanford, however, has no intention of giving up, even though Eliza has "terminated the affair." He is, after all, moving to Eliza's hometown, which is a particularly bold move.*

## LETTER XXXI. TO MISS ELIZA WHARTON.

Lucy responds, pleased with Eliza's decision to quit the company of Major Sanford. Lucy considers libertines and rakes more dangerous to society than "the robber and the assassin," claiming their corrupt actions "the disgrace of humanity and virtue." Lucy closes her letter by citing a poem. "In spite of all the virtue we can boast, / The woman that deliberates is lost."

*Lucy subtly implies through a poem that if Eliza continues to "deliberate," or weigh her options in terms of which suitor to pick, her virtue will be lost in the process. This suggests that Eliza, or any woman for that matter, requires a man to be complete, and it again reflects the sexist nature of their society.*

## LETTER XXXII. TO MR. CHARLES DEIGHTON.

"I am really banished and rejected," Sanford writes Charles. He is quite heartbroken by Eliza's termination of their relationship, although he is optimistic about taking possession of his new home "in the vicinity of [his] charmer's native abode." Living this close to Eliza's home and family, Sanford hopes to continue his "plan of separating her from Mr. Boyer." In a short aside, Sanford tells Charles that he was forced to mortgage his new home because he couldn't actually pay for it. Sanford must "keep up the appearance of affluence" until he finds a "lady in a strait for a husband, whose fortune will enable [him] to extricate [himself] from these embarrassments."

*This again illustrates that Sanford has no respect whatsoever for Eliza's wishes and preferences. He plans to move to her town and sabotage her current relationship just to get what he wants, which probably amounts to a cheap affair, since, despite his feelings for Eliza, he never intends to marry her. This passage also confirms that Sanford is broke, and the very thing Eliza finds most attractive about him—his wealth—is a farce.*

## LETTER XXXIII. TO MISS LUCY FREEMAN.

Eliza again writes Lucy and tells her of Reverend Boyer's intention to "seduce [Eliza] into matrimony." She is tempted to accept, but Boyer is so "solemn," and this trait is "not a favorite one to" Eliza. She has agreed to allow him to "expatiate on the subject," as long as he allows Eliza to "take [her] own time for the consummation." He will be taking Eliza home next week to visit her mother and she is excited to again be with her family.

*Eliza is slowly surrendering to Boyer, not because she loves him, but because her friends and their patriarchal society have worn her down. Eliza thinks Boyer is dull, and she suspects her life as his wife will be both confining and oppressive, but also boring, which is the direct opposite of her natural disposition.*

## LETTER XXXIV. TO MRS. RICHMAN.

Eliza writes to Mrs. Richman from her mother, Mrs. Wharton's, home in Hartford and tells her how happy she is to be with her family again. Major Sanford has recently moved to town as well, and while he has been exceedingly pleasant to Eliza, his respect of Mr. Boyer is a "result of habit." Eliza plans to go to visit Lucy Freeman in the following days to help her prepare for her upcoming wedding. "I am anxious to hear of a wished for event and of your safety," Eliza writes to Mrs. Richman in closing.

*Here, Eliza implies that Mrs. Richman is expecting a child, which was never openly discussed in polite society during the eighteenth-century, and this is another reflection of their strict, patriarchal society. As pregnancy cannot occur without sex, it is considered inappropriate to mention, so Eliza politely, and discreetly, references "a wished for event," or the birth of a child, instead.*

## LETTER XXXV. TO MISS ELIZA WHARTON.

General Richman writes Eliza at "Mrs. Richman's request," as she has just given birth to a **baby** girl. General and Mrs. Richman are glowing with happiness over their expanding family and hope to receive an invitation soon to attend Eliza's marriage to Reverend Boyer.

*General Richman's letter to Eliza is more than just a birth announcement; it is another attempt to persuade Eliza to ignore her true desires and marry Boyer, and it is more evidence of her friends' complete disregard for her personal choices and feelings.*

## LETTER XXXVI. TO MRS. RICHMAN.

"Hail happy **babe**!" Eliza writes to Mrs. Richman. After relaying her happiness regarding the newest addition to the Richman family, Eliza tells Mrs. Richman about Lucy Freeman's wedding. She claims Lucy and her new husband are a "charming couple," owing to a "similarity of tastes" and "consonance of their dispositions." Reverend Boyer took the event as an occasion to ask Eliza to do "likewise," but she ignored any talk of her own marriage. She meant only to enjoy the party, and even danced with Major Sanford, although Boyer's presence hampered her enjoyment as he seemed rather jealous. "Lucy Freeman, now Mrs. Sumner," will move to Boston next week and Eliza will join her. "Kiss the dear little babe for me," Eliza writes in closing.

*General and Mrs. Richman's baby is a symbol of their perfect marriage and the joy of the domestic sphere, which makes marriage and childrearing appear as perpetually happy states. Of course, this isn't true, but the idea is to make Eliza (and all women) believe that she can only be truly happy if she enters the domestic sphere, as this is her designated, and natural, role. With the addition of Lucy's wedding, Eliza is surrounded by domesticity and is clearly feeling very pressured.*

## LETTER XXXVII. TO MR. CHARLES DEIGHTON.

"My hopes begin to revive," Sanford tells Charles. Eliza has proved agreeable to continuing to interact with him in social situations, and he couldn't be happier. "Love her, I certainly do," admits Sanford, but their limited finances make their union impossible. He considers marrying her anyway, but his deception and the truth about his wealth is sure to be a "source of discontent." Eliza is leaving tomorrow for Boston with the newly married Mrs. Sumner, Sanford says. "I must follow her."

*Sanford finally admits that he loves Eliza, but this doesn't mean that he intends to do right by her. He knows that his money is in large part what attracts her to him, and he worries that she will feel differently once she discovers he is bankrupt. Still, he must conquer her if possible and he has no intention of giving up, regardless of how many times she asks him to.*

## LETTER XXXVIII. TO MRS. M. WHARTON.

Eliza writes her mother, Mrs. Wharton, from Boston and reports that Lucy is "agreeably settled and situated" and "possess of every blessing which can render life desirable." They have frequented the theater (where they ran into Major Sanford) and the circus, but such an active social life has proved expensive. "I fear that your will think me extravagant when you are told how much," Eliza tells her mother. Mr. Boyer has since returned to his own home in Hampshire. "O mamma! I am embarrassed of this man," Eliza admits. "His worth I acknowledge; nay I esteem him very highly. But can there be happiness with such a disparity of disposition?"

*Eliza doesn't think she can be happy with Boyer because they are so different. Lucy and her new husband are so happy together in large part because they are so similar (they have the same disposition and opinions and come from the same social class), so Eliza assumes she will never be happy with such a solemn man—especially with the way she spends money. Preachers are often known to be prudent and economical, and Eliza spends money (that she probably can't afford) on frivolous things, like entertainment and fashionable clothes.*

## LETTER XXXIX. TO MR. T. SELBY.

Boyer writes Mr. Selby and apologizes for neglecting their friendship, but he has been preoccupied lately. Boyer had accompanied Eliza back to her home and now fears that there may be some merit to Selby's claim that she is a coquette. Boyer had also gone to Boston with Eliza on her insistence but thought himself "neglected" in her company. Eliza claims that she will marry Boyer; however, she doesn't know when she will be ready to do so.

*Obviously, Eliza doesn't want to get married, so she is stalling, and Boyer is beginning to feel as he is just being strung along and taken advantage of. She asks for more time, but Boyer doesn't respect this either. He complains to Eliza and Selby that she is noncommittal, and it only adds to Eliza's discomfort and mounting misery.*

Boyer made the mistake of mentioning Major Sanford to Eliza—who, incidentally, has purchased a home in New Haven—and she claimed Boyer was merely jealous. The end of their visit was stained by this interaction, but they "parted amicably." Eliza will soon be going back to Hartford, and Boyer intends to visit her there. Despite her coquettish airs, "she is very dear to [him]," and he still intends to marry her.

*Here, Boyer excuses Eliza of her coquetry, which he later cites as the main reason why he no longer wants to marry her. Boyer is a hypocrite despite all his virtue—he is willing to accept Eliza's cheerful disposition until it causes him too much jealousy, then it is grounds for her dismissal.*

## LETTER XL. TO MR. T. SELBY.

"I have returned; and the day, indeed, is fixed," writes Boyer to Selby, "but Oh! how different from my fond expectations!" When Boyer arrived at Eliza's he found her arriving home in the company of Major Sanford, and she quickly resumed "the same indecision, the same loathness" to bring her courtship with Boyer to a marital close. She insisted that Major Sanford was just a friend, and that she had no romantic intentions toward him; however, recent gossip implies otherwise.

*The town gossip is yet another reflection of their sexist and patriarchal society. Eliza can't simply be friends with a man without also sleeping with him, and while Eliza's behavior has been innocent, Boyer is growing convinced that her virtue is tainted. Still, the fact that Boyer doesn't believe Eliza suggests that he has very little respect for her.*

The next day, Boyer called on Eliza at home, but she was indisposed. Mrs. Wharton claimed that Eliza had not been sleeping well and had been recently been struck by headaches, but that she would meet him later in the garden. When Boyer returned at the agreed upon time, Eliza had gone out to the garden but requested that she not be disturbed. Curious, Boyer went to the garden anyway and found Eliza in the company of Major Sanford.

*With this passage begins the hints that Eliza is struggling with some sort of illness. While these symptoms are certainly vague, Eliza's health has clearly begun to suffer. Of course, Eliza is under enormous stress with her feelings for Sanford and her expected marriage to Boyer, but this suggests that her illness is more than simply depression or anxiety.*

Upset, Boyer ran from the garden and Eliza quickly followed. They met in the parlor where Eliza burst into tears. "Will you," she asked, "permit me to vindicate my conduct and explain my motives?" Boyer responded that there was no excuse for a woman who sacrificed her honor. "Too long has my peace of mind been sacrificed to the arts of a woman, whose conduct has proved her unworthy of my regard," answered Boyer. "Farewell!"

*Like Eliza's friends, Boyer is intolerant and doesn't allow her to explain. Eliza was attempting to tell Sanford that she intended to marry Boyer and could not see him anymore, but Boyer does not give her the chance to say this. He assumes that Eliza is immoral and lacking virtue, and therefore beyond explanation. This assumption reflects Boyers self-righteousness, but it also suggests that he actually has very little respect for Eliza or her feelings, despite professing to love her.*

## TO MISS ELIZA WHARTON. ENCLOSED IN THE FOREGORING.

"I take this method of bidding you a final adieu," Boyer writes Eliza. He writes Eliza "not as a lover" but as a "friend" who is concerned for her "happiness," "reputation," and "temporal and eternal welfare." He encourages her to "fly Major Sanford," a man he considers to be "a deceiver." Quitting Major Sanford is the only way for Eliza to preserve her virtue, Boyer claims, and as a friend, he implores her to see reason.

*Like Eliza's female friends, Boyer uses friendship as a means to insult and degrade Eliza. He implies that she is immoral and lacking virtue, and that she is risking eternal damnation. Eliza has done nothing to warrant such harsh censure, but as a woman, her virtue is considered extremely fragile and can't survive even a hint of promiscuity.*

Further acting in the role "of a disinterested friend," Boyer informs Eliza that "there is a levity in [her] manners" that is "inconsistent with the solidity and decorum becoming a lady," and that "there is also an unwarrantable extravagance betrayed in [her] dress." He tells Eliza this not "from resentment" but "from benevolence," so that she may "renounce" these faults. "I wish you to regard this letter as the legacy of a friend," Boyer says in closing.

*Boyer's continued insults are wholly unnecessary and are indicative of his own jealousy and perceived shortcomings. He knows that he doesn't have enough money for Eliza's taste, so he implies that taste is sinful. His mention of her clothing is also unnecessary, and the fact that Boyer also sent this letter to Selby is damning, as well. Boyer could have simply told Selby he broke up with Eliza and left it at that; instead, he shares with Selby the intimate details of their separation, including Boyer's unnecessarily harsh treatment of Eliza. Boyer's treatment of Eliza does more than avenge her behavior—it encourages Eliza to conform to accepted notions of proper eighteenth-century womanhood, and as such, it serves to uphold and reinforce oppressive patriarchal ideals.*

## LETTER XLI. TO MRS. LUCY SUMNER.

Eliza writes Lucy and tells her that Hartford is "gloomy" after the excitement of Boston, but the addition of Major Sanford has made town more exciting. He has recently returned from Boston as well, and Eliza has a wonderful time in his company, but she has decided to marry Reverend Boyer. Eliza's relationship with Sanford is platonic, and while he frequently begs her for more, she is not likely to concede.

*Eliza's letter to Lucy is proof that she intended to reject Sanford and accept Boyer's proposal. It is clear that Eliza doesn't love Boyer, but she is willing to finally accept her role as a proper woman and marry the man she is supposed to. To Eliza, it is clear that she is not free to live her life as she chooses, and she is forced to surrender to patriarchal ideals and restrictions.*

Eliza met with Major Sanford in the garden to inform him of her choice regarding Reverend Boyer, and when she did, she was surprised to see Boyer enter the garden as well. Boyer glared at her Sanford with "indignant accusation" and immediately ran from the garden. Eliza followed, and meeting him in the parlor, she wept and asked him to hear her explanation. "My motives were innocent," Eliza writes, "though they doubtless wore the aspect of criminality, in his view." Boyer refused and promptly left. When Eliza realized that he had really gone and "forsaken [her]," she fainted.

*Eliza faints because she knows that she will likely not be able to convince Boyer her intentions are innocent, and her future has been ruined over a misunderstanding. This is more evidence of Eliza's unfair treatment. She has not behaved inappropriately with Sanford and she intended to marry Boyer, but she is not given the benefit of the doubt. It is assumed that she is immoral and not suited for a virtuous man like Boyer.*

## LETTER XLII. TO MR. CHARLES DEIGHTON.

"The show is over, as we yankees say," Sanford writes Charles, "and the girl is my own." Sanford tells Charles that he had gone to visit Eliza and that the Reverend Boyer had interrupted their talk. Boyer gave them "a pretty harsh look and retired without speaking a word." Eliza ran after Boyer, but he quickly exited and left town. Eliza told Sanford that Boyer's "resentment at her meeting [Sanford] in the garden was so great, that he bid her a final adieu."

*When Sanford says the "the girl is [his] own," what he means is that the girl isn't someone else's. Eliza hasn't consented to a relationship with Sanford, but then again this isn't what he is looking for. He simply doesn't want Eliza to be with any other man, and since it appears that Boyer has left the picture, Sanford has indeed succeeded in his plan.*

Sanford reassured Eliza that her displeasure and "embarrassments" wouldn't last, and by the time Sanford returned from his trip to the South, she would be back to her old vivacious self. Sanford tells Charles that his trip southward is "occasioned by the prospect of making a speculation, by which [he] hopes to mend [his] affairs."

*Sanford is leaving town for no other reason than to go see about obtaining a rich wife. This again cements Sanford as a despicable person—he sabotages Eliza's future marriage while simultaneously securing one (with a different woman, of course) for himself.*

## LETTER XLIII. TO MISS ELIZA WHARTON.

Mrs. Richman writes to Eliza and offers her condolences regarding Eliza's separation from Reverend Boyer. "I had long contemplated a happy union between you," writes Mrs. Richman. While she is saddened by these recent events, Mrs. Richman is most disappointed to hear that Eliza has suffered lately from depression and resigned herself to "solitude and dejection."

*The fact that Eliza has resigned herself to "solitude and dejection" is evidence of the severity of her depression, and likely her failing health in general. Eliza's greatest joys in life are her friends and social engagements, and she no longer has the desire to partake in these activities.*

Mrs. Richman goes on to talk about her family. "All my happiness is centered within the limits of my own walls," she says, "and I grudge every moment that call from the pleasing scenes of domestic life." Mrs. Richman does not mean to neglect her friends—she even invites Eliza for another visit—but "conjugal and parental love are the main springs of [her] life."

*Mrs. Richman paints her life in the domestic sphere in an overly flattering light, which she hopes will entice Eliza to enter the domestic sphere, as well. As an eighteenth-century woman, Mrs. Richman believes that her rightful, and only, role is in the home.*

## LETTER XLIV. TO MRS. LUCY SUMNER.

"I am extremely depressed, my dear Lucy!" Eliza writes. Major Sanford has recently gone southward for several months, and Eliza has "declined any further conversation with him, on the subject of love." She is planning to soon visit Mrs. Richman in New Haven and hopes this will "dissipate the gloom which hangs over [her] mind."

*Eliza is clearly depressed that Boyer has rejected her, but even though he is no longer in the picture, Eliza still doesn't feel free to pursue any kind of relationship with Sanford. She obviously doesn't wish to marry him, but she also doesn't wish to see him in any other capacity. She has experienced the consequences of coquetry firsthand, and she isn't looking to worsen her current situation.*

Reverend Boyer's recent rejection of Eliza has made him "appear in the brightest colors," and this "fatal separation" has caused her to realize how "insensible" her regard of Boyer had been. She had considered writing him to "confess [her] faults" and "offer her hand," but the harshness of his most recent letter suggested that he would not be open to such a proposal.

*Of course, Boyer isn't open to Eliza's apologies, he has already told her in no uncertain terms that he is too good for her, so she has no reason to believe he will ever think otherwise. Eliza only wants Boyer now because he doesn't want her.*

## LETTER XLV. TO THE SAME.

Eliza has returned home to her mother, Mrs. Wharton, she writes to Lucy, but can't find happiness even there. Eliza has been for some months vising Mrs. Richman in New Haven, but she could not find joy in a social setting. Mrs. Richman suggested that Eliza write to Reverend Boyer, claiming it will be "a relief to [Eliza's] mind," and she agreed. Eliza hopes she can "rekindle the gentle flame" that once burned between them.

*Even after Boyer has left Eliza, Mrs. Richman continues to push Eliza in his direction. Boyer never does take Eliza back, and when he answers her letter and tells her that he has married another, this only adds to Eliza's despair. Once again, Mrs. Richman's meddlesome ways are more hurtful than helpful to Eliza.*

Major Sanford has not written Eliza in nearly twelve months. "Has he too forsaken me?" Eliza asks Lucy. If he has, Eliza claims, that won't be nearly as painful as Reverend Boyer's continued rejection. She has heard gossip that Sanford will soon be married, but Eliza can hardly believe it. She closes her letter and asks Lucy to send her word of the local theater productions in Boston, which she regards as her "favorite amusement."

*Eliza inquires about the theater because that is the closest thing she has to a social life in her depressed state. Eliza is beginning to realize that she won't end up with either Boyer or Sanford, and with her now tarnished reputation, she has little prospects for the future, which only serves to compound her fragile state.*

## LETTER XLVI. TO THE REV. J. BOYER.

"I cannot but hope that this letter coming from the hand which you once sought," Eliza writes to Reverend Boyer, "will not be unacceptable." Instead of an apology, Eliza tells Boyer that she "frankly confesses" her "offences" and assures him that they "cost [her] the deepest repentance." Eliza confesses that she loves Boyer, and that their separation all these months has deepened that love. She hopes to "rekindle the latent flame" of their association, but if he has already found happiness, she wishes not to "interrupt [his] enjoyments." Eliza closes her letter with well wishes, "whatever may be [her] destiny."

*Whether Eliza really loves Boyer or just thinks she does is debatable, but regardless of this, she is still willing to confess to an "offence" that she didn't necessarily commit, simply because she is a woman and presumed to be guilty. Eliza's own belief that she has wronged Boyer reflects how deeply she is affected by patriarchal oppression and ideals—she is willing to admit guilt when she isn't guilty, simply to appease a man and secure her future stability.*

## LETTER XLVII. TO MISS ELIZA WHARTON.

"Madam," responds Boyer to Eliza. "The regard which I felt for you was tender and animated, but it was not of the passionate kind which ends in death or despair." Boyer tells Eliza that her previous conduct convinced him that his regard was "misplaced," and that she does not possess the "charms which [he] had fondly ascribed to [her]." Boyer goes on to say that through "artifice and dissimulation," Eliza "strove to render [him] the dupe." He has recently been married to a "virtuous," "amiable," and "accomplished" women, and while he will always "cherish sentiments of kindness towards [Eliza]," her letter "came too late."

*Boyer's response to Eliza is condescending and clearly meant to make her feel even worse. He basically tells her that he never really loved her that much, so it makes no sense for her to pursue him or continue to pine for him. He tells her he has married a "virtuous" woman, which is to say that Eliza is not a virtuous woman, but what's more, he insinuates that any feelings he may have felt for Eliza in the past were never really there in the first place.*

## LETTER XLVIII. TO MRS. LUCY SUMNER.

"I am shipwrecked on the shoals of despair!" Eliza writes to Lucy. Eliza encloses a copy of her letter to Boyer and his answer and tells her friend about Reverend Boyer's rejection. "But I do not blame Mr. Boyer," Eliza says. "He has acted nobly." Still, Eliza is regretful that she sent the letter to Boyer in the first place. "I have given him the power of triumphing in my distress!" she cries. The only thing that could possibly make Eliza feel better is a visit from their dear friend, Julia Granby, a request she hopes Lucy will relay to her.

*Eliza's depression is worsening, and now she is convinced that Boyer has "acted nobly," which again reflects the patriarchy. Boyer was jealous, suspicious, and unrelentingly mean and intolerant, which is certainly not noble. But, since Boyer is a man and worthy of respect and esteem, Eliza gives him a pass and instead continues to punish herself.*

## LETTER XLIX. TO MISS ELIZA WHARTON.

"You refer yourself to my friendship for consolation," Lucy writes Eliza, "but I must act the part of a skillful surgeon, and probe the wound, which I undertake to heal." Lucy reminds Eliza of the "fanciful folly" that caused all this trouble in the first place. Lucy says that Eliza is "among the first rate coquettes," but now Lucy is happy to see the "returning empire of reason" reflected in Eliza's behavior. Julia has accepted Eliza's invitation. "She is a good girl," Lucy says, "and her society will amuse and instruct you."

*Lucy's reference to Eliza's emotional pain as a "wound" that she must "probe" before healing it again implies that Lucy isn't the greatest friend in the world. In all likelihood, Eliza has learned her lesson (if there is a lesson to learned) and she will undoubtedly act accordingly in the future. However, Lucy is intent on beating a dead horse, so to speak, and she continues to call Eliza a "coquette" even though there are clearly no men in her life. It appears that Eliza's punishment for lacking virtue is not yet over.*

## LETTER L. TO MRS. LUCY SUMNER.

Eliza writes Lucy and tells her that Julia has arrived. "She is all that I once was," Eliza says, "easy, sprightly, debonair." Eliza knows that Lucy will only say her unhappiness is "the result of [Eliza's] own imprudence," which Eliza admits may be true, but this doesn't make her situation any less painful. Julia wants Eliza to attend social functions with her as she doesn't wish to go alone, but Eliza can't bear it. She is much too depressed over Mr. Boyer's rejection

*Eliza is all but begging Lucy to cut her some slack about her perceived bad decision making regarding Sanford and Boyer and let it go so that she can try to heal in peace, but Lucy is intent on reminding Eliza that it was her behavior that led her here. Of course, it wasn't so much Eliza's behavior as it was the unyielding nature of their sexist society, but Lucy doesn't make this distinction and therefore it is Eliza's fault entirely. If Lucy was a true friend, she would comfort Eliza instead of adding to her misery.*

## LETTER LI. TO MRS. LUCY SUMNER.

"You commanded me to write you respecting Miss Wharton," Julia writes to Lucy, "and I obey." Julia claims that Eliza has completely changed, and that her previous "vivacity has entirely forsaken her." Eliza has turned into a "recluse," and Julia has desperately been trying to cheer her up and get her out of the house. "Pray madam," Julia tells Lucy, "write her often." Friendship appears to be all Eliza has left.

*Indeed, friendship is all Eliza has left, but her friends leave much to be desired. Lucy appears to think herself superior to Julia, since she "commands" Julia to write her and expects Julia to "obey." Unlike Eliza, Julia bends to Lucy's will easily enough.*

Julia tells Lucy that Major Sanford's home is "undergoing a complete repair." He is rumored to return soon, and bring his new wife, as well, although Eliza refuses to believe it. Julia hopes that, for Eliza's own sake, "it will prove true." Julia found Eliza in her room just the other day holding a small picture of Sanford. Eliza claims "neither to love, nor esteem him," but she has forgiven him, Julia says. She closes her letter and tells Lucy to expect her back in Boston by winter.

*Eliza is obviously pining over Sanford if she is staring at a picture of him so intently, and this is further proof of her unresolved feelings. Julia knows that Eliza will be heartbroken if Sanford is married, but Julia wishes for it anyway, which suggests she is more concerned with Eliza's reputation and virtue than she is with her actual feelings or general happiness.*

## LETTER LII. TO MISS ELIZA WHARTON.

Lucy writes to Eliza and begs her to "rise above" her present depression. "Avoid solitude," Lucy orders, as solitude is likely to exacerbate Eliza's state of mind. "True courage consists not in flying from the storms of life," Lucy preaches, "but in braving and steering through them with prudence." She tells Eliza that she recently saw a production of *Romeo and Juliet*, but "death is too serious a matter" to be made into entertainment. The circus was likewise disappointing, and Lucy considers the female performers "inconsistent with the delicacy of a lady." The museum, Lucy says, is much more to her liking. She plans to visit Eliza in the summer and, until then, Lucy begs her to "be cheerful."

*Lucy suggests that Eliza is "flying," or running away, from her problems, and she implies that this makes Eliza a coward. Eliza is not a coward because she has been struck by depression; she is simply human and doing the best she can. Still, her friend continues to degrade her and imply that she is somehow less because of her current mental state. Lucy attempts to steer the conversation to something more benign, like the theater, but even this reveals Lucy as an intolerant and judgmental prude.*

## LETTER LIII. TO MRS. LUCY SUMNER.

"Gracious Heaven!" Eliza writes to Lucy. "What have I heard?" Eliza tells Lucy that Sanford is married. "Yes, the ungrateful, the deceitful wretch, is married!" Eliza has heard that his new wife has money, and she supposes that Sanford believes as she once did, "that wealth can ensure happiness." Before this terrible news, Eliza says, she had achieved some "cheerfulness" with Julia's help, but now it is lost. Eliza intends to travel with Julia to Boston for the winter, hoping that "varying the scene may contribute effectually to dissipate the gloom of [her] imagination."

*This is further evidence of Eliza's worsening depression and the torch she still carries for Sanford. She openly admits here that she had previously thought money could buy her happiness—which is perhaps the only real offense she is guilty of—but she seems to have now learned her lesson. Eliza appears to want to return to her social life and previous "gay" state of living, but she does very little to make this happen.*

## LETTER LIV. TO MR. CHARLES DEIGHTON.

"It is your old friend," Sanford writes Charles, "metamorphosed into a *married man!*" It was "dire necessity" that has caused Sanford's marriage, and his new wife, Nancy, comes with "five thought pounds in possession, and more in reversion." Miss Laurence was only worth half that, and Nancy is "a handsomer, and more agreeable person," Sanford claims.

*Sanford clearly doesn't respect women or value them beyond what they can give him. He speaks of Miss Laurence as if she was merely a bank and not a woman, and he considers Nancy better because she has more money.*

Still, Sanford can't help but pine over Eliza. "O, Eliza," he cries, "accuse me not of infidelity; for your image is my constant companion!" Having returned to Hartford, Sanford plans to visit Eliza tomorrow and "solicit her friendship" for his wife, Nancy. That way, Sanford may "enjoy [Eliza's] society, at least." He can't stop thinking about Eliza, and he "impatiently anticipates the hour" when he can see her again.

*Interestingly enough, Sanford is worried that* Eliza *will think him unfaithful, not his wife, who is actually the wronged woman in this scenario. Sanford is clearly taking advantage of Nancy for money and his heart belongs to Eliza, which means he has betrayed Nancy's heart and trust.*

## LETTER LV. TO MRS. LUCY SUMNER.

Eliza writes to Lucy and tells her she had a visit from Major Sanford. He had sent Eliza a letter requesting a visit once he returned to Hartford, and after Julia said there was no harm in it, Eliza agreed to meet him. He admitted that he was married but wished that Eliza was his wife instead. "Why, then," Eliza asked him, "did you marry her?" Sanford admitted his "embarrassing state of affairs" and claimed he married only for money. He also claimed to love Eliza "most ardently" and wept. "Yes, Lucy," Eliza writes, "this libertine; this man of pleasure and gallantry wept!"

*Sanford is very clearly in love with Eliza and now openly admits that he is both financially and morally bankrupt. This passage also highlights how important wealth is in eighteenth century society. Sanford is willing to sacrifice his happiness and love for Eliza just to retain his class standing and perceived wealth.*

Sanford went on to ask Eliza to be a friend to his wife, Nancy. She is "a stranger" in Harford after all, and she would appreciate Eliza's friendship. Eliza claimed that she "could not grant, at present," Sanford's request, although she may at some future date. "I must acknowledge that this interview has given me satisfaction," Eliza tells Lucy. She is hopeful that this "tragic comedy [...] will come to a happy end."

*Eliza finds some comfort in Sanford's misery, just as Boyer found some comfort in insulting Eliza. Of course, Sanford cares very little if his wife has friends, he simply wants to keep Eliza close and part of his life for as long as possible and having her befriend his wife is the perfect opportunity.*

## LETTER LVI. TO MRS. LUCY SUMNER.

"Major Sanford has returned," Julia writes to Lucy, "and amity (but not commerce,) is ratified." Julia reports that Eliza is lifting from her depression, and while Eliza claims she wishes to return to her gay disposition, she does little to guarantee its reoccurrence. "These are indications of a mind not perfectly right," Julia says.

*Here, Julia implies that it is more than mere depression that is keeping Eliza down, as Eliza expresses the desire to improve but appears unable to do so. Julia falsely believes that Eliza is only being polite to Sanford and that she has no romantic feelings for him.*

Julia recently met Sanford and "disliked him exceedingly." She has "no charity for these reformed rakes." While on a walk with Eliza, Julia again ran into Sanford and his wife, Nancy, and they endured a pleasant exchange. Eliza was obviously uncomfortable, and Sanford's eyes never left her, but she thankfully declined tea when the Sanfords offered. Eliza later claimed Mrs. Sanford a lovely woman and questioned Sanford's virtue for marrying her for money.

*Julia instantly dislikes Sanford on the basis of his reputation, which is further evidence of her intolerance and self-righteousness. She has no proof that he is lacking virtue, she simply assumes this because he is rumored to be sexually promiscuous. Eliza, on the other hand, has every reason to believe him immoral and is finally beginning to see this.*

## LETTER LVII. TO MRS. LUCY SUMNER.

Eliza and Julia recently went to dine at Major and Mrs. Sanford's, and Eliza writes Lucy to tell her about it. The party was large, and Eliza found all guests agreeable. After dinner, Sanford "gave [Nancy's] hand" to Mr. Grey, a stranger, and took Eliza's for himself. Sanford was kind and spoke only of friendship, and he again asked Eliza to befriend his wife. Eliza assured him that she was much too depressed to be a suitable friend to his wife. Eliza closes her letter and thanks Lucy for her previous entertainment update. "I think it a pity they have not female managers for the theater," Eliza writes. "I believe it would be under much better regulation, than at present."

*Sanford continues his open pursuit of Eliza, despite the presence of his wife. He willingly hands his wife off to a stranger so that he is free to spend time with Eliza. Foster's use of the phrase "he gave her hand" to another man harkens to their own marriage and implies that Sanford would have no problems giving her away completely under the right circumstances—like in the event that Eliza was also wealthy and could solve his financial problems. Sanford's indifference to his wife is more evidence of his despicable character.*

## LETTER LVIII. TO MR. CHARLES DEIGHTON.

"Rejoice with me, my friend," Sanford writes Charles, "that I have made my peace with the mistress of my heart." Sanford goes on to say that he has "atoned" for his past offenses, and that Eliza has forgiven him. Sanford's "sensibility" surprised even himself. "Why, I was as much a woman as the very weakest of the sex!"

*Here, Sanford openly admits that he believes women inferior, and that in his romantic condition, he is no better than the "weakest" woman. While Sanford may "atone" for past offenses, he certainly does nothing to cease those he is currently guilty of, like misleading his wife and continuing to pursue Eliza.*

Sanford tells Charles that Eliza "is extremely altered," and that her depressed nature "mortifies [him] exceedingly." He suspects Reverend Boyer is to blame for Eliza's despair, but he "flatters" himself "to have contributed in a degree." Sanford visits her often, sometimes with Nancy, and the two have become friends. He thinks about Eliza constantly when he is not with her, and Nancy has grown suspicious. She recently asked Sanford if Eliza "had a fortune," and Sanford assured her that she didn't. "No," he said, "if she had I should have married her." Sanford knows this comment upset his wife, and while he did apologize for it, he isn't sorry. He doesn't love Nancy.

*Sanford clearly doesn't respect Nancy and he cares very little about her feelings. He openly shows her contempt and doesn't even attempt to hide his feelings for Eliza. This behavior also aligns with patriarchal ideals—as Sanford believes himself superior to Nancy (and all women), he has no problem hurting her feelings and being the source of her misery. Furthermore, Sanford doesn't seem particularly worried that Nancy will leave him, which suggests women are expected to silently endure this type of marital abuse and neglect.*

## LETTER LIX. TO MRS. LUCY SUMNER.

Eliza writes Lucy to tell her that, while Julia is headed to Boston, Eliza will not be joining them. She prefers to stay home with her "melancholy reflections," but hopes that Julia will soon return to her. Eliza has been spending more time with Major and Mrs. Sanford lately; he treats Eliza with the "tenderness of a brother," and Nancy treats her with the "attention of a sister." Eliza believes that Sanford's previous feelings for her are "entirely obliterated." Eliza signs off after writing very little, claiming: "Writing is not so agreeable to me as it used to be."

*Eliza's health is clearly deteriorating. She doesn't want to visit her friends in Boston, and she is even neglecting her letter writing, an activity that has been particularly important in the past. Eliza clearly doesn't see that Sanford is still very much pursuing her, and she has misinterpreted his intentions. He does not look at her like a sibling but like a lover.*

## LETTER LX. TO THE SAME.

Julia writes Lucy and informs her that all her attempts to persuade Eliza to travel to Boston have been "in vain." Eliza's depression is worsening again, something Julia noticed after Eliza was "in company with Major Sanford." He calls on Eliza nearly every day, and Julia recently caught them in close and quiet conversation. Eliza swears their relationship is not "inconsistent with the purest friendship," but Julia isn't so sure. They recently took tea at neighbor's, and Sanford arrived alone, claiming Nancy was indisposed. He then spent the remainder of the night talking to Eliza. Their closeness has begun to rouse suspicion.

*Julia implies that Eliza's status has declined since reconnecting with Sanford, and this suggests that Eliza isn't quite over him yet. It also implies that Eliza feels guilty over their association and her depression is worsening because of it. Either way, Eliza continues to deteriorate, and Julia still doesn't believe that her conduct with Sanford is appropriate or moral, and this has begun to cause gossip in town.*

Julia warned Eliza about her "visible fondness for the society of such a man." Clearly, "marriage has not changed [Sanford's] disposition," she told Eliza. She implored Eliza not to fall victim to his "evil machinations." Julia claimed that if Sanford was of better character, he "would merit [Eliza's] esteem," but the reality is opposite. Eliza began to weep and refused to speak more on the subject. Julia called at Nancy Sanford's the next day to say goodbye before leaving for Boston and learned that she knew nothing about tea the previous day and not been indisposed. "This is the first word I ever heard about it," Nancy said. As Julia closes her letter, she tells Lucy that she is hesitant to leave Eliza. "I tremble at her danger!" Julia cries.

*Julia again takes to lecturing Eliza, which only makes her feel worse. Eliza knows that her attraction to Sanford is considered inappropriate, so she certainly doesn't need Julia to remind her. She doesn't offer Eliza support; rather, Julia speaks of Sanford's "evil machinations," which is an insult to both Sanford's morality and, by extension, Eliza's. Julia clearly doesn't trust Eliza or Sanford, and she calls on Nancy as a friend just to catch Eliza and Sanford in a lie, which not only undermines Julia and Eliza's friendship, but Julia and Nancy's as well.*

## LETTER LXI. TO MISS ELIZA WHARTON.

"Julia, you say, approves not Major Sanford's particular attention to you," Lucy writes Eliza. "Neither do I." Lucy begs Eliza to be careful with Sanford's professed friendship and tells her not to listen to his compliments. "It is an insult upon your understanding for him to offer them," Lucy says. "It is derogatory to virtue for you to hear them." Lucy goes on to remind Eliza that her reputation is an "inestimable jewel, the loss of which can never be repaired." Before closing her letter, Lucy again attempts to persuade Eliza to come to Boston.

*Lucy is just as judgmental of Eliza as Julia is. She openly disapproves of Sanford and explicitly states that Eliza is lacking virtue simply because she entertains Sanford's attention. As Lucy rants about Eliza's immorality, she neglects to recognize the good things about Eliza—such as her dedication and loyalty to her friends and family—but Lucy ignores her good qualities and condemns her based solely on the bad.*

## LETTER LXII. TO MISS JULIA GRANBY.

Eliza writes one letter to both Julia and Lucy, who are both now in Boston. "Writing is an employment," Eliza says, "which suits me not at present." Eliza reports that, sadly, Mrs. Richman "has buried her **babe**." Eliza has just written Mrs. Richman a long letter but has otherwise been ignoring society. She is "trying what a recluse and solitary mode of life will produce," since her gay disposition has caused her such trouble. She asks her friends to continue writing her, even if she doesn't reciprocate.

*Mrs. Richman's baby serves as a symbol of her perfect marriage and complete dedication to the domestic sphere. When the baby dies, this suggests that even the happiest wives and mothers are not immune to despair, and that marriage and domestic life are not always perfectly enjoyable. Eliza continues to decline both physically and mentally and has completely withdrawn from society.*

## LETTER LXIII. TO MISS ELIZA WHARTON.

Julia writes Eliza and expresses her condolences for Mrs. Richman's **baby**. She speaks briefly about her time in Boston with Lucy and then tells Eliza about the time Lucy refused to date a reformed rake before she married Mr. Sumner. Lucy knew that a rake can never truly be reformed and doubted his virtue. "I hope neither you, nor I, Eliza, shall ever be tried by a man of debauched principles," Julia writes. "Such characters I conceive to be totally unfit for the society of women, who have any claim to virtue and delicacy."

*Julia's hope that they will never "be tried by a man of debauched principles" is completely patronizing. Julia knows full well that Sanford is a rake, and she also knows how Eliza feels about him. Julia's comment is another underhanded way of telling Eliza that Lucy and Julia are virtuous and moral, whereas Eliza has allowed herself to be corrupted "by a man of debauched principles" and is "totally unfit for society."*

## LETTER LXIV. TO MRS. LUCY SUMNER.

Julia writes Lucy and informs her that she has arrived back at Eliza's in Hartford. When Eliza first saw Julia, she immediately burst into tears and hugged her. She lamented her "gloom" and appeared frail and sick. Mrs. Wharton told Julia that while Major Sanford will visit daily for some time, he also goes long stretches without corresponding at all. Julia reports that Eliza rarely goes out and hates having visitors.

*Eliza is very clearly wasting away. She is thin and unhealthy and has become a complete recluse. She has changed completely from the cheerful and vivacious Eliza introduced at the beginning of the novel, and it appears that Sanford has again forsaken her. Just as Eliza's friends warned, Eliza's choice to forsake her virtue has led to her undoing.*

## LETTER LXV. TO MR. CHARLES DEIGHTON.

"Good news, Charles, good news!" Sanford writes. "I have arrived to the utmost bounds of my wishes; the full possession of my adorable Eliza!" It was a difficult task indeed, but Sanford is yet to be "defeated in [his] plan." Since then, Eliza's mind and health have been "impaired," and Nancy too has not been well. She recently birthed a **baby** boy, "a dead one though," Sanford says. These events, however, bring Sanford "neither pain nor pleasure." Sanford tells Charles that Julia Granby will be visiting Eliza soon. "Now there's a girl, Charles, I should never attempt to seduce," Sanford says. She is beautiful, but "her manners forbid all assaults upon her virtue."

*When Sanford tells Charles that he has had "full possession" of Eliza, what he means to say is that he has finally had sex with her, and the sudden worsening of Eliza's depression suggests that she is racked with guilt. Sanford and Nancy's baby serves as a symbol of their marriage, and when the baby dies, this tragedy reflects the ruined state of their union. Sanford is indifferent to the death of his son, just as he is indifferent to Nancy, and he cares only that Eliza has become another notch in his belt.*

## LETTER LXVI. TO MRS. LUCY SUMNER.

"Oh, my friend," Julia writes Lucy. "I have a tale to unfold!" While staying with Eliza, Julia noticed that Eliza had left the house in the middle of the night and returned in the company of a man. "My blood thrilled with horror at this sacrifice in virtue!" Julia cries. She confronted Eliza the next day, and she admitted that she had been with Major Sanford. Eliza "is ruined!" Julia writes. She has "sacrificed [her] virtue to an abandoned, despicable, profligate!" Eliza's physical health is also suffering; she has a "decaying frame," "faded cheek[s]," and "tottering limbs."

*Eliza's condition has worsened far beyond depression and is beginning to take over her entire body. Still, Julia gives very little attention to Eliza's physical health and wellbeing and is more interested in gossiping about Eliza and condemning her behavior. Eliza is clearly in need of her friends' sympathy and comfort, and they give her neither. Both Julia and Lucy are more concerned with Eliza's reputation and failure to live up to expected womanly ideals.*

"It is the purest friendship," Julia told Eliza, "which thus interests me in your concerns." Julia can't understand how Eliza could behave this way after all the warnings her friends have given her. "You have forfeited the favor of your friends," Julia said to Eliza, "and reluctant will be their forgiveness." Eliza begged for Julia's forgiveness and asked her to keep "this distressing tale" from Mrs. Wharton for the time being. Eliza promised to write her mother a letter. "After she knows my condition," Eliza said, "I cannot see her."

*Julia's treatment of Eliza is nothing short of cruel. Julia claims to be her friend, but then implies that she has reached her limit and can't forgive Eliza. As Eliza's relationship with Sanford has nothing to do with Julia, it seems strange that Eliza should need forgiveness for it in the first place, and it is particularly awful that Julia is "reluctant" to grant it. Eliza hints that she is pregnant in her refusal to face her mother, but she doesn't say it directly and Julia doesn't seem to notice, as she is too preoccupied by judging Eliza.*

Despite Julia's insistence that Eliza stay away from Major Sanford, Eliza claimed that she could not comply with her friend's wishes. In fact, she had tried to "flee from him" but "found it too late." Eliza's "circumstances called for attention," and she had "no one to participate [her] cares, to witness [her] distress, and to alleviate [her] sorrows, but him." Eliza again spoke of her waning health. "I have not a single wish to live," Eliza said.

*It is "too late" because Eliza is pregnant, and since her patriarchal society insists that she be dependent upon a man, she has no one to turn to but Sanford. Eliza's friends have clearly forsaken her as well. They gave her little sympathy when they merely* suspected *she slept with Sanford, now that she officially has, she has no reason to believe that they will ever accept her again. In this way, their rejection has sent her right back to Sanford.*

## LETTER LXVII. TO THE SAME.

"She is gone!" Julia writes to Lucy. "Yes, my dear friend, our beloved Eliza, is gone!" A few days earlier, Eliza had gone to the garden to meet "her detestable paramour," and when she returned, she immediately retired to her room where she wept and wrote. She refused to come downstairs and begged Julia to make an excuse to Mrs. Wharton on her behalf. Later, she appeared calm and claimed: "It is finished, […]. You will know all to morrow, Julia."

*Julia is surprised that Eliza has fled, but she has given her no reason to stay. Julia explicitly told Eliza that her friends would not forgive her affair with Sanford, so it seems only appropriate that she has left them. Eliza has already said she can't face her mother "in her condition," so Julia's surprise seems a bit misplaced, and a bit overdramatic.*

That evening, Eliza refused dinner, and then she fell to Mrs. Wharton's feet and wept. "Oh madam!" she cried. "Can you forgive a wretch, who has forfeited your love, your kindness, and your compassion?" Her mother assured Eliza she could never be such a person, but she swore forgiveness no matter the offense. That night, Eliza gave Julia two letters—one for Mrs. Wharton, the other for Julia—and she made her promise not to open them until the next day. The letter, Eliza said to Julia, "must close the account between you and me."

*Mrs. Wharton's forgiveness is clearly important to Eliza, but she seems to have given up on Julia's. Eliza's comment that the letter "must close the account" of their friendship is another reflection of Eliza's preoccupation with money, but it also suggests that she has given up on Julia, as well. She no longer wishes to have her forgiveness or her friendship.*

Later, Julia woke to the sound of the front door and saw Eliza leave, followed by a man. Of course, it was Major Sanford, Julia says. Mrs. Wharton was roused from sleep as well and came out of her room. "Eliza has left us!" Julia cried. She ran for the letters, and after they read them, they were both struck with grief. "O Julia," Mrs. Wharton cried, "this is more than the bitterness of death!"

*The fact that Mrs. Wharton believes Eliza running away with a man and getting pregnant "is more than the bitterness of death" reflects the importance of virtue in early American society. Eliza's death probably would be easier on Mrs. Wharton; at least that way Eliza wouldn't be considered immoral and lacking virtue.*

## LETTER LXVIII. TO MRS. M. WHARTON.

"My Honored And Dear Mamma," Eliza writes to Mrs. Wharton. "Yes, madam, your Eliza has fallen; fallen, indeed!" Eliza tells her mother that she has fallen "victim" to "her own indiscretion" and has been "polluted" by a married "libertine." She claims to be "a reproach and disgrace to [her] friends," and because of this, she has decided "to conceal from them the place of [her] retirement." She assures her mother that she is taken care of and asks her not to worry, but "the effect of [her] crime is too obvious to be longer concealed," and as such, she must leave. "Farewell, my dear mamma!" Eliza writes, "pity and pray for your ruined child."

*As Eliza's pregnancy advances, it is becoming more difficult to conceal, and she wishes to spare her mother the indignity of becoming a public disgrace. This of course is another reflection of their sexist society, but Eliza's running away is in large part due to the harshness of her friends. Perhaps if Eliza had a better support system in her friends, they could have talked her out of running off and abandoning her mother.*

## LETTER LXIX. TO MISS JULIA GRANBY.

"My Dear Friend," Eliza begins her letter to Julia. Eliza goes on to tell Julia that she has "reason to think [herself] in a confirmed consumption, which commonly proves fatal to persons in [Eliza's] situation." She claims she will soon be leaving, and since she doesn't have the "resolution to encounter the tears of her friends," she has decided instead to "seek shelter among strangers."

*Here, Eliza implies that she is leaving because she can't face the disappointment and judgement of her friends, but she also implies that she has tuberculosis when she claims to be "in a confirmed consumption." Tuberculosis, or TB, is a bacterial infection that usually settles in the lungs, but it can also infect the brain and spine. Pregnancy usually pushes latent TB into active TB, and it greatly increases disease progression. Eliza doesn't have any respiratory symptoms, but she could easily have TB of the brain that is further exacerbated by her pregnancy.*

Eliza claims that she will come back if her health allows and repent for her indiscretions, but if she dies "and leaves behind [her] a helpless **babe**," she begs Julia to "intercede with [her] mother to take it under her protection." She also asks Julia to apologize to Mrs. Richman and Mrs. Sumner on her behalf and "obtain, if possible, their forgiveness." Eliza asks her friend to "bury [her] crimes in the grave with [her]" and "preserve the remembrance of her former virtues."

*Eliza obviously doesn't want to be remembered as a coquette who died without virtue or honor, and she certainly doesn't want her baby to be painted with the same brush. Illegitimate children were often punished for their mothers' discretions in the eighteenth century, and Eliza's plea to Julia to help her mother care for the child is her attempt to ensure this doesn't happen.*

## LETTER LXX. TO MR. CHARLES DEIGHTON.

"I have, at last, accomplished the removal of my darling girl," Sanford writes Charles, "from a place where she thought every eye accused, and every heart condemned her." Sanford tells Charles that Nancy has begun to suspect that he is hiding something, and he knows she will soon divorce him. He considers marrying Eliza but finds this idea difficult to imagine. "It would hurt even my delicacy," Sanford writes, "to have a wife whom I know to be seducible."

*Sanford's continued refusal to marry Eliza on the grounds that she is "seducible," and therefore not marriage material, again reflects their sexist society. Sanford's own promiscuity is excused while Eliza's is not, and it makes no difference to Sanford that he is the one who seduced her.*

Sanford plans to visit Eliza tomorrow. "From the very soul I pity her," Sanford claims, "and wish I could have preserved her virtue consistently with the indulgence of my passion." He doesn't blame Eliza entirely for her plight— "as in like cases, I do to the sex in general," Sanford says—and he looks forward to seeing her. "Her friends are all in arms about her," he claims, and figures it won't be long before he is forced to move from town.

*This too suggests that Sanford is a despicable and sexist man. He regrets what has happened to Eliza, but he only wishes he could have "preserved her virtue"* and *slept with her. Sanford doesn't seem willing to sacrifice his own pleasure to save Eliza's reputation or virtue, and if this is how it had to turn out for him to get what he wanted, then so be it. In this way, Eliza has definitely been hit by his "paw," and Sanford indeed considers it entirely* her *problem.*

Sanford has taken Eliza to a **roadside inn** in a neighboring state, but before he did, Eliza cursed him for rendering her "the reproach of [her] friends, the disgrace of [her] family, and a dishonor to virtue and [her] sex." Still, she forgave him and said she only wished for her "unhappy story" to "serve as a beacon to warn the American fair of the dangerous tendency and destructive consequences of associating with men" like Sanford. Sanford begged Eliza to return to Hartford and be his wife, but she refused and agreed to receive him as a friend only. He returned home alone. "My body remains behind," Sanford writes, "but my soul, if I have any, went with her!"

*The roadside inn is symbolic of Eliza's oppression as a woman. She attempted to resist the patriarchy and live a life of her choosing, and now she is basically shunned. As Eliza hasn't behaved like a proper eighteenth-century woman should, society has rejected her. Ironically, this task has been executed almost entirely by Eliza's friends, who now "reproach her." In this way, women, particularly a woman's friends, are instrumental in reinforcing and upholding patriarchal ideals—the very same ideals that seek to oppress and marginalize them.*

## LETTER LXXI. TO MRS. LUCY SUMNER.

"The drama is now closed!" Julia writes to Lucy. "A tragical one indeed it has proved." Recently, in a Boston newspaper, Mrs. Wharton read a notice about a young woman matching Eliza's description who died at Danvers after giving birth. Eliza's brother immediately dispatched a carriage to **the roadside inn** at Danvers and returned with "several scraps of [Eliza's] writing, containing miscellaneous reflections on her situation, the death of her **babe**, and the absence of her friends." The woman was indeed Eliza.

*Eliza died alone in Danvers, but not before she also endured the death of her child, which she also had to do alone without the comfort of her friends. Eliza's writings suggest that her friends remained in her thoughts despite all they have been through, and she no doubt died in misery without them. While Foster's story is meant to be a cautionary tale about women who sacrifice their virtue, she portrays Eliza in an incredibly sympathetic way that suggests her fall and eventual demise were not entirely of her own doing, and that Eliza's friends and sexist society had an equal hand in guiding her actions.*

"I am told that Major Sanford is quite frantic," Julia writes. His wife, Nancy, has left him, and he lost his mortgaged home when he lost her fortune. Only "poverty and disgrace await him!" Julia says. She laments the depressed state of Mrs. Wharton, who has been "stripped of the best solace of her declining years, by the ensuring machinations of a profligate debauchee!" Both Eliza and Mrs. Wharton, Julia claims, "have fallen victims at the shrine of *libertinism!*"

*Even in Eliza's death, Julia is judgmental and harsh, and she shows more sympathy for Mrs. Wharton than she does for Eliza. Sanford meets an end that he truly deserves—Nancy leaves and takes all her money, and he is disgraced and ruined. While Sanford can certainly go on seducing women, this is likely to be difficult as a bankrupt and homeless man.*

## LETTER LXXII. TO MR. CHARLES DEIGHTON.

"Oh, Deighton," Sanford writes, "I am undone!" He tells Charles about Eliza's death and expresses his deep love for her and regret that she is now gone. Sanford's wife and house are gone now, as well; Nancy has finally divorced him, and he signed over his house to appease his creditors. "In short I am barred from every kind of happiness," Sanford tells Charles and bids him a final farewell. "Let it warn you, my friend, to shun the dangerous paths which I have trodden."

*Sanford implies that Charles is a rake, as well, and he implores him to stop. Sanford is ruined, and his fate also serves as a cautionary tale for men who play fast and loose with their own virtue, a criticism unheard of in the eighteenth century, especially coming from a female author. Foster's novel was not published under her name until after her death, and this is perhaps one of the reasons why. Like Eliza, Foster too appears to resist the patriarchy.*

## LETTER LXXIII. TO MISS JULIA GRANBY.

Lucy immediately responds to Julia's letter. She tells her that she "sincerely sympathizes" with Mrs. Wharton's pain, and doesn't have the "power to express" her sorrows. She remarks that Eliza's decision to flee required much "resolution." "Happy would it have been," Lucy says, "had she exerted an equal degree of fortitude in repelling the attacks upon her virtue!"

*Lucy is just as judgmental as Julia. She immediately sympathizes with Mrs. Wharton, not Eliza, and she again mentions Eliza's lack of virtue. It seems a moot point to continue to condemn Eliza, but both Lucy and Julia continue as if it will do some sort of good.*

Lucy closes her letter, but first she tells Julia that she wishes "it engraved upon every heart, that virtue alone […] can secure lasting felicity." She wishes for Eliza's "melancholy story" to stand as a lesson to "the American fair" to "reject with disdain every insinuation derogatory to their true dignity and honor." She wishes them to "banish" and "despise" the men who seek to seduce them. "To associate, is to approve," Lucy says, "to approve, is to be betrayed!"

*Lucy's claim that only virtue "can secure lasting felicity" certainly wasn't true in Eliza's case. Eliza was unhappy long before she sacrificed her virtue, but Lucy refuses to see this. Lucy's wish for Eliza's story to stand as a lesson is directly against Eliza's own wishes to be remembered for her good qualities, and it too suggests that Lucy never really knew Eliza at all.*

## LETTER LXXIV. TO MRS. M. WHARTON.

"Dear Madam," Julia writes Mrs. Wharton. Julia and Lucy have just returned from Danvers, where they visited Eliza's final resting place. "The grave of Eliza Wharton," Lucy said, "shall not be unbedewed by the tears of friendship." They sat graveside for nearly an hour, and then Lucy commissioned a "decent stone" to be placed. The stone bears a long inscription and says: "This humble stone, / in memory of / Eliza Wharton, / is inscribed by her weeping friends, / to whom she endeared herself uncommon / tenderness and affection." The stone also celebrates Eliza's "humility and benevolence," and claims that in her final moments, Eliza "exhibited an example of calm resignation."

*Lucy's commissioned gravestone suggests that she is feeling guilty for treating Eliza badly in life and is trying to make it up with a fancy gravestone. Although, the inscription is exactly how Eliza would have wanted to be remembered: as a loyal and dedicated friend and daughter without any mention of coquetry. For the first time, Eliza is finally being acknowledged as a woman a virtue, which Foster suggests has been the case all along.*

Julia bids Mrs. Wharton farewell and hopes that the stone "may alleviate [her] grief." She tells Mrs. Wharton that the stone offers "the pleasing remembrance of her virtues," and she assures her that "[her] Eliza is happy."

*While Eliza is finally being regarded as virtuous woman, it is unfortunate that it took her dying for her friends to recognize it.*

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