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Melissa J. Homestead

University of Nebraska - Lincoln, mhomestead2@unl.edu

Camryn Hansen

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

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MELISSA J. HOMESTEAD *University of Nebraska-Lincoln*

CAMRYN HANSEN

Susanna Rowson's Transatlantic Career

On April 2, 1794, Susanna Rowson, an actress and novelist recently arrived in the United States from England, placed an advertisement in the *Gazette of the United States* announcing to Philadelphia readers a proposal “for printing by subscription an original novel . . . *Trials of the Human Heart*.” The novel by which most American literary historians know Rowson, *Charlotte Temple* (first published in London in 1791), had not yet appeared in its first American edition; nevertheless the advertisement identifies the author of the proposed *Trials of the Human Heart* as “Mrs. Rowson, of the New Theatre, Philadelphia, Author of *Victoria*, *Inquisitor*, *Charlotte*, *Fille de Chambre*, &c. &c.” Further fusing her identities as actress and novelist, Rowson advises potential subscribers that, in addition to at the offices of several printers, “Subscriptions are received by the Author, the corner of Seventh and Chesnut Streets”—that is, just outside the theater where she acted in plays most nights of the week.¹

The social networks that Rowson exploited to achieve her economic and artistic aims were both local and transatlantic. Standing bodily on a street corner outside the New Theatre receiving subscriptions for her first novel authored on American soil, she sought to make herself known to a new community and to create for that community an association between herself as an author and her body of work.² *Trials of the Human Heart* did not issue from the presses until more than a year after the subscription proposal first appeared, but this moment in April 1794 marks the beginning of Rowson's successful campaign to restage her careers as novelist and actress simultaneously in America. Indeed, the contention that *Charlotte* is best understood as part of Rowson's career, a career that spanned a period of years and the Atlantic Ocean, is central to our analysis and to the recovery of Rowson's authorial agency. In *Women and Authorship in Revolutionary America*, Angela Vietto argues for the importance of the “literary career” as a category of analysis for women, of “examinin[g] the course writers followed in their pursuit of writing as a vocation—their progress in

a variety of kinds of projects, both in their texts and in their performances as authors” (91). Although we leave the work of textual analysis across the range of Rowson’s literary works to other scholars, we take up the work of recovering American’s first best-selling novel as part of a transatlantic career that Rowson herself constructed and made visible.

As a recent surge in transatlantic readings of Rowson’s work testifies,³ the facts of Rowson’s biography make a transatlantic approach nearly inevitable. Born Susanna Haswell in England in 1762, she moved to the American colonies at the age of five and spent her childhood happily in Massachusetts until the Revolutionary War intervened. A prisoner exchange returned her Loyalist family to England in 1778. Fifteen years later, in 1793, a married Susanna Rowson embarked on her third Atlantic crossing with her husband, William, to join Thomas Wignell’s theater company in Philadelphia. As Jeffrey Richards aptly argues, Rowson’s theatrical career embodies the Anglo-American transatlanticism of the early American theater, making “Rowson . . . herself the space or hyphen between the two English-speaking cultures” (22).⁴

At the same time, Cathy Davidson’s widely disseminated work on the publishing history of *Charlotte Temple* has largely prevented literary historians from recognizing that Rowson herself was responsible for making her career as a novelist transatlantic by arranging for the American republication of her novels first published in London. While Davidson focuses primarily on American readers of *Charlotte* in the late eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, she also presents a seemingly authoritative account of how Mathew Carey came to issue the first American edition of *Charlotte* in 1794. Although the details of her several accounts differ, Davidson consistently represents Susanna Rowson as entirely uninvolved in the reprinting, a victim of the clever and entrepreneurial Carey, a notorious book “pirate” who took advantage of the then fledgling and inadequate American copyright law to steal and profit from her work. Rowson was further victimized, Davidson claims, by laws concerning married women’s property and wages, which allowed William to usurp all proceeds of her literary labors.⁵ This portrait of Rowson as doubly detached from her novel on the American market has been consequential, focusing much scholarly attention primarily on the possible meanings of *Charlotte* for American readers and isolating *Charlotte* from Rowson’s broader dual careers as author and actress in the 1780s and 1790s.

Certainly, both copyright and coverture did limit Rowson's legal agency as a married immigrant woman author. The first federal copyright statute, enacted in 1790, specified that the law protected works by authors who were "citizens of these United States, or residents therein." The statute not only specified narrowly what works it did protect, but went further, taking pains to stipulate that a broad category of print works was available for reprinting: "[N]othing in this act shall be construed to extend to prohibit the importation or vending, reprinting or publishing within the United States" of works "written, printed, or published by any person not a citizen of the United States, in foreign parts or places without the jurisdiction of the United States" (Solberg 32, 34). Since *Charlotte* was written and first published when Rowson resided in Britain and was a subject of the Crown, neither Rowson nor Mathew Carey could claim U.S. copyright protection for it. Furthermore, the common law of coverture converted any property or payments generated by Susanna's authorial labors into William's property.⁶

Nevertheless, evidence from Mathew Carey's business records and Philadelphia newspapers demonstrates that Susanna Rowson was actively involved in and financially compensated for the publication of Carey's 1794 edition of *Charlotte*. Other evidence suggests that copies of *Charlotte* and most of her other novels crossed the Atlantic with Rowson herself, who ensured that her works found an American audience by arranging for new editions with Carey and other Philadelphia publishers.⁷ Situating the U.S. publication of *Charlotte* in the broader context of Rowson's dual careers as actress and novelist in both England and America, and in the local context of the Philadelphia print trades, we reconstruct Rowson's agency in the American reprinting of *Charlotte*, and, indeed, several other novels she wrote and first published in Britain. Despite the law's limitations, Rowson reacted creatively rather than passively, reshaping the boundaries of the possible. Determined to make a living in the nascent American culture industries, she worked diligently and strategically to stage her own emergence as an artist known by name in two media, "Mrs. Rowson, of the New Theatre, Philadelphia, Author of *Victoria*, *Inquisitor*, *Charlotte*, *Fille de Chambre*, &c, &c.," a woman who was not only an accomplished novelist but a popular actress on and playwright for the Philadelphia stage.

Susanna Rowson's decisions surrounding republication of her existing novels and the publication of a new one in America can be fully under-

stood only in the context of the author's earlier career in Britain. When she left London in late 1793 with a company of actors bound for the New Theatre in Philadelphia, she had been a regularly publishing novelist, occasional poet, and sometime actress for nearly seven years.⁸ However, her careers as actress and author remained largely separate affairs. Rowson's acting experience in England was confined primarily to provincial stages rather than to more lucrative and prominent work in London, the center of literary publishing and the birthplace of all of her novels.⁹ Unsurprisingly, London magazines reviewing Rowson's novels did not comment on her acting career.¹⁰ Moreover, since with few exceptions novel writing was only modestly remunerative in late eighteenth-century England, the financial rewards of authorship and provincial acting combined would have produced only a modest income.

Nevertheless, print authorship was more open to individual initiative than acting was, and as an author, Rowson was inventive and experimental in her commercial arrangements. Her six novels and two volumes of poetry published between 1786 and 1792 appeared under the imprints of four publishers, and her arrangements with printers and publishers took several different forms. By nature, this variety of arrangements dispersed and occasionally masked her authorial identity on the British market—a situation she later partially reversed by deliberately consolidating her authorial identity in America in relation to most (but not all) of her books. Her first novel, *Victoria* (1786), issued from the London press of J. P. Cooke shortly before her marriage to William Rowson with her maiden name, Susanna Haswell, featured on the title page.¹¹ By the 1780s, novelists typically transferred their copyrights to publishers for a flat fee, but Susanna Haswell followed an older model. She dedicated her novel to an aristocratic patron, the Duchess of Devonshire (who, by James Raven's count, had more London novels dedicated to her during the 1780s and '90s than any other patron [56]), and financed the publication of the novel by subscription, including a list of the subscribers' names after the dedication to the duchess. Cooke thus functioned solely as printer "for the Author," rather than as a publisher who assumed the financial risk and responsibility for marketing and distribution. Two years later, George Robinson of London published *The Inquisitor; or, Invisible Rambler* by an author now identified as "Mrs. Rowson." Despite the change in the author's name, the further identification of the author on the title page as "Author of *Victoria*"

began the construction of "Mrs. Rowson" as what Michel Foucault calls an "author function," a sign under which readers can classify texts, grouping them together, defining them, and differentiating them from and contrasting them to others (107).¹² Robinson acted as a publisher, paying Rowson thirty pounds for the copyright in the novel, about average for Robinson's payments to novelists (Bentley 75). Rowson retained at least the verbal trace of patronage, however, dedicating the novel to Lady Cockburne as a "small mark of . . . gratitude" from "Her Ladyship's much honoured, obliged humble servant, Susanna Rowson." Robinson also undertook the publication of *Poems on Various Subjects*, including an advertisement in the *Inquisitor* announcing that "Speedily will be published, in octavo, with a frontispiece, a collection of poems, by the author of this work" (qtd. in Vail 141). The title page of *Poems* identifies the author as "Mrs. Rowson," further drawing together her first three published volumes under a single authorial identity.

The remaining four novels Rowson published in London before departing for Philadelphia testify to the rise of the circulating library as the engine driving late eighteenth-century British publishing, although two of these novels were not visible to British readers as part of "Mrs. Rowson's" body of work. In 1789, John Abraham, a printer-publisher who owned a circulating library, published *The Test of Honour*, its author identified only as "A Young Lady." Rowson never directly claimed authorship of this novel; however, Samuel L. Knapp, who knew Rowson in Boston, first identified it as her production after her death and characterized it as "principally taken from a manuscript furnished by a bookseller" ("Memoir" 5).¹³ Knapp also named Rowson as the author of an anonymous long poem published the preceding year in London by Abraham, *A Trip to Parnassus; or, The Judgment of Apollo on Dramatic Authors and Performers (Female Biography 397)*. Designated on the title page as "printed by and for" Abraham (meaning he was both printer and publisher), the title does not identify the author in any way. In the preface, however, the author, writing in the third person, refers to herself using the feminine pronoun. Dedicated to Thomas Harris, "Manager of the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden," the poem lampoons the morals of London playwrights and actors. If Rowson had publicly claimed authorship of the volume at the time of its publication, her identities as a relatively unknown actress on the provincial stage and the author of two London novels might have merged. But although Rowson

apparently enjoyed telling her friends in Boston a decade or more later about her published critique of the stars of the London stage, her name—and her profession as an actress—did not circulate with the poem in London. Indeed, the *Critical Review* classed the anonymous author of *A Trip to Parnassus* with the “modish saunterer[s]” who espoused opinions based on casual stops at the theater—she was “a harmless fly” who might “buzz” for a short while but could not “sting” (qtd. in Vail 147).

William Lane’s Minerva Press brought out Rowson’s next three novels after *The Test of Honour*. Lane was the predominant supplier of novels to circulating libraries, and he issued a full third of all new novel titles in the 1790s (Raven 79). But despite the Minerva imprint common to *Charlotte*, *Mentoria*, and *Fille de Chambre*, Rowson’s publishing strategies for these novels differed significantly. Though *Charlotte* and *Mentoria* both appeared in 1791, *Charlotte* appeared in January anonymously while some months later, *Mentoria* appeared with a title page claiming authorship “By Mrs. Rowson, Author of *Victoria*, &c. &c.” The narrator of *Charlotte* identifies herself as an adult woman, and in the preface, the unnamed author-narrator identifies her audience as “the young and thoughtless of the fair sex” (v). However, since the narrator also insists that the book is a “tale of truth” featuring characters and incidents derived from personal experience, as a matter of consistency the title page cannot and does not identify the author (identical to the narrator, according to the text) as an established novelist. In contrast, the “Mrs. Rowson” identified as the source of *Mentoria* on the novel’s title page was also identified as the author of *Victoria*, and, by implication, also the author of *The Inquisitor*.

By the end of 1791, therefore, “Mrs. Rowson” had assumed a public identity as the author of three novels, while making no public claim of authorship to two others. As in the case of *Victoria*, Rowson financed the publication of *Mentoria* by subscription, even though she did not include a dedication to a single prominent patron. When Lane published *The Fille de Chambre* in late 1792, Rowson’s name did not appear on the title page, and in the absence of a subscription list, one may assume that Rowson transferred the copyrights of both *Charlotte* and *The Fille de Chambre* to Lane for a one-time payment. Significantly, however, *The Fille de Chambre*, unlike *Charlotte*, contributed to the intertextual construction of Susanna Rowson as an author because even in the absence of her name, the title page identified the novelist as “the Author of the *Inquisitor*, &c. &c.” Though *The Fille*

de Chambre features an orphan heroine, Rebecca, among her novels published by Lane, Rowson effectively orphaned only *Charlotte* by neglecting to claim authorship as “Mrs. Rowson” or by creating a title page genealogy (e.g., “By the author of *Victoria* and *Fille de Chambre*”) enabling readers to link the novel to its sisters in the absence of an author’s name. While these London edition title pages kept Rowson’s authorial identity dispersed for British readers, in her American editions, Rowson would gather most of her literary progeny together, including *Charlotte*, and publicly claim them as her own.

Rowson’s arrival at the port of Philadelphia in late 1793 presented her with a unique opportunity not only to restage her novelistic career in a new market but to join it within this new market to her acting career. Rowson shared her status as an obscure provincial player with most of the other members of Thomas Wignell’s company. As theater historian Ruth McKenzie observes, because most of the company’s members “had not yet been able to make much of an impression on London audiences . . . the opportunity to play roles of significance in the capital of the United States” was tempting enough to lure them across the Atlantic (successful London players would have had little incentive, financial or otherwise, to leave) (37).

For a time, however, the renaissance of Rowson’s stage career was unexpectedly delayed by the yellow fever epidemic raging in Philadelphia in August and September, the very time that the ship bearing Wignell’s company arrived at the city’s port. The *George Barclay*, bearing the company of fifty-six British actors imported to stock the New Theatre, thus anchored in the middle of the Delaware River while Wignell investigated conditions. Ultimately, he decided to lodge his actors on the New Jersey side until he could arrange for them to be transported to Annapolis, Maryland, where they would present an abbreviated season opening on December 20. It was not until the yellow fever epidemic subsided and the populace returned that Wignell’s actors first set foot in Philadelphia, opening their first season on February 17, 1794, in the Chestnut Street Theatre built especially for them (Seilhamer 149–51).

In his autobiography, Philadelphia printer-publisher Mathew Carey recalled that in 1793 and 1794, he was “seized with a theatrical mania,” which led him to frequent the theaters “about twice for every three times the the-

atre was open” (Schwaab 29). He also converted his theatrical enthusiasm into fodder for the local newspapers, which published his dramatic criticism. His reviews led Wignell and Alexander Reinagle, the New Theatre’s other proprietor, to send William Rowson, the theater’s prompter, to Carey with an offer of “freedom of the house” (i.e., free admission and access to backstage). Recounting this exchange decades later in 1833, Carey claimed that he declined the offer specifically to preserve the independence of his critical judgment (Schwaab 29).¹⁴ He conveniently omitted, however, any account of the mutually beneficial commercial arrangement he struck up with William Rowson at the same time. Soon after the opening of the New Theatre’s first Philadelphia season, Carey was printing inexpensive pamphlet versions of songs from the theater’s productions for William Rowson to sell to theatergoers on commission.¹⁵ Significantly, the combination of Mathew Carey’s regular attendance at the New Theatre and William Rowson’s regular sale of theatrical songs printed by Carey (including songs from plays Susanna Rowson performed in) would have put Carey in regular contact with both William and Susanna Rowson in the spring of 1794. Carey’s edition of *Charlotte*, the reprints of Rowson’s other novels, and the subscription publication of *Trials of the Human Heart* all emerge from this network of social and commercial relationships established early in Rowson’s American career.

Understanding the events of the spring of 1794 requires a digression into 1793—the year that *The Inquisitor*, the first Philadelphia (and first American) reprint of a Susanna Rowson novel, appeared. Coincidentally, Philadelphia printer William Gibbons brought out his edition of *The Inquisitor* before Susanna Rowson became a public figure on the stage of the Chestnut Street Theatre. Gibbons, whose imprint was relatively new (and ultimately short-lived), put Rowson’s novel in the company of other British works he reprinted, such as Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and Samuel Richardson’s *Pamela*. Briefly, he also printed “for the proprietors” a short-lived women’s magazine, *The Lady’s Magazine and Repository*.¹⁶ Gibbons’s edition of *The Inquisitor* closely mimicked George Robinson’s edition of five years before: he replicated the three-volume format, identified the author on the title page as “Mrs. Rowson, Author of *Victoria*,” and reproduced the dedication to Lady Cockburne. However, Gibbons also added the key claim “First American Edition” to his title page.¹⁷ No known evidence survives of the sales and reception of

Gibbons's edition of *The Inquisitor*, but Philadelphia readers may have been puzzled by Gibbons's decision to reprint a novel by an author who would have been entirely unknown to most of them. R. W. G. Vail's magisterial bibliographic study of Rowson's works documents that *Victoria* did cross the Atlantic soon after its publication; however, imported copies landed only in Massachusetts, appearing in the catalog of Guild's Circulating Library in Boston in 1789 and 1791 and in bookseller John Dabney's stock in Salem in 1791 (Vail 77). For Philadelphia readers, Rowson's identity on the title page of Gibbons's edition of *The Inquisitor* as "the Author of *Victoria*" would thus carry little weight, except, perhaps, to suggest that an author who had successfully published more than one novel deserved respectful attention.

While Gibbons's edition of *The Inquisitor* certainly proves that at least one copy of the London edition of this novel eventually made its way to Philadelphia before Rowson herself had arrived, evidence suggests that very few copies of Rowson's novels made their way to America before 1794. Modern scholars (and especially those concerned with Rowson's success on the American market) have sometimes imagined that American readers in the early 1790s could choose from a plenitude of imported and reprinted editions of the latest novels issuing from London presses.¹⁸ As we shall see, such accounts are inaccurate in more than one respect, overestimating not only the number of imported copies in circulation but the prevalence of American reprints. First editions of London novels typically ran a modest 500 to 750 copies, which publishers aimed to sell quickly to recover costs, and second editions were very rarely printed at all (Raven 35–38). Such small print runs left very few copies available for export to the former colonies. Furthermore, London booksellers were reluctant to part with recent, profitable titles, preferring instead to ship off to the former colonies less desirable older titles that were no longer selling in England (Amory and Hall 187, 298). As a result, American readers had access to very few copies of recently published London novels in their original editions, with those few copies residing either in the circulating libraries in major cities or in the private libraries of the wealthy, who could afford to purchase the imported copies or order their books directly from London.¹⁹ Moreover, despite the American copyright law's promotion of reprinting, only rarely did American publishers in the 1780s and early 1790s reprint recent London novels.²⁰ The high cost of type, paper, and labor in the new nation

made untried longer books of all kinds (including longer novels) a financial gamble many printers and publishers were unwilling to take, especially when some imported copies were available. As Robert Winans has demonstrated, when American publishers *did* reprint London novels, material constraints of the trade largely dictated their choices of which ones to reprint: they favored shorter novels (such as Laurence Stern's *Sentimental Journey* [1768]) and abridged editions of longer ones.²¹ They also favored works whose popularity was already established—that is, not new, untried works. These circumstances changed in the late 1790s and into the early nineteenth century, as both the importation of current London novels and their American reprinting increased (as evidenced by the 1804 catalog of Hocquet Caritat's famous lending library and bookstore in New York City [Raddin *Early New York*]). Nevertheless, in the early 1790s, Philadelphia readers could easily purchase an abridged edition of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748) (a novel of proven popularity in a shortened format), but few would have been able to purchase or borrow any of Susanna Rowson's novels.²² As a consequence, the vast majority would never have even heard of Rowson or her novels.

Once Rowson stepped onto the Chestnut Street Theatre stage, however, becoming far more prominent than she ever had been in Britain, the name "Mrs. Rowson" acquired a value for Philadelphians that it had never carried before. Shrewdly, Rowson took advantage of her new prominence as an actress to advance her career as a novelist in two interconnected ways: she began work on a new novel to be published in Philadelphia, and she arranged with local publishers for new editions of almost all of her previously published novels, ensuring her theater audience access to them. We thus return to the opening vignette of this essay, better prepared to understand the significance of the moment when, on April 2, 1794, less than two months into Rowson's first Philadelphia season with the New Theatre, ads began appearing in Philadelphia papers proposing the subscription publication of her new novel, *Trials of the Human Heart*.

Clearly specifying that it would be "An Original Novel," the ads named the author "Mrs. Rowson, Of the New Theatre, Philadelphia, Author of *Victoria*, *Inquisitor*, *Charlotte*, *Fille de Chambre*, &c. &c." These advertisements, for which Rowson herself was clearly responsible, conjoin her acting and novel-writing careers in print for the first time, coining the identity "Mrs. Rowson, of the New Theatre, Philadelphia" that would ultimately

appear on decades of title pages of *Charlotte*. Specifying that the novel would be “Dedicated, by Permission, to Mrs. Bingham,” the subscription proposal also reveals how quickly Rowson had allied herself with wealthy patrons of the New Theatre. A noted salonnière and cosmopolitan, Anne Willing Bingham had been received in the French court and had firsthand knowledge of the European theater. Her husband, William Bingham, was one America’s wealthiest men, and had helped to finance the construction of the Chestnut Street Theatre. Indeed, the theater location on Chestnut Street had been chosen specifically for its proximity to the New Society Hill neighborhood, the location of the grand Bingham mansion and the homes of other wealthy Philadelphians who could afford the theater’s expensive box seats.²³

The subscription proposal suggested that the novel would be both long (“Four Volumes, duodecimo”) and finely produced (“to be printed with neat type on good paper”—unlike Gibbons’s *Inquisitor*, printed with poor-quality type on low-quality paper). Patricia Parker hypothesizes that Rowson relied on subscription publication, a method that “had passed out of favor in the United States as it had in England,” because Rowson “felt less sure of herself” without the support of Anne Bingham, her influential patron (87).²⁴ However, as historian Rosalind Remer has demonstrated, subscription publishing “remained [strong] through the 1790s” in Philadelphia because printers and publishers lacked the capital and credit networks necessary to finance the publication of many books, particularly longer titles (19).²⁵ No Philadelphia publisher, not even Mathew Carey, would have taken on an untried book of the length of *Trials* as a speculative venture. Aware of this, Rowson assembled three prominent Philadelphia publishers—Mathew Carey, Thomas Dobson, and brothers Henry and Patrick Rice—to support the venture, accepting individual subscription payments on Rowson’s behalf and subscribing for twenty copies each on their own accounts. The proposal also lists booksellers in New York, Boston, Vermont, Annapolis, Baltimore, and Charleston who were accepting subscriptions. Rowson’s associating herself closely in the proposal (and eventually on the novel’s title page) with the New Theatre and its most prominent female patron also had a marketing function. Those who wanted to subscribe could purchase subscriptions not only from booksellers but “from the Author, [at] the corner of Seventh and Chesnut Streets,” next door to the New Theatre. Depicting the purchase of a novel

subscription from Mrs. Rowson as a quick stop en route to see her act on the New Theatre stage, the subscription proposal firmly links Rowson's theatrical and authorial careers. The advertised price of the complete four-volume novel was an extraordinary "four dollars bound, one half to be paid at the time of subscribing." While such a sum was affordable to those who, like Anne Bingham, occupied the theater's boxes, it was unlikely to entice those in the cheap seats.

It is worth emphasizing here that at the time Rowson first proposed the subscription publication of *Trials*, Mathew Carey had not yet published his edition of *Charlotte*, nor were editions of Rowson's other novels listed in the proposal available for purchase in Philadelphia, with the exception of Gibbons's 1793 *Inquisitor*, which may have initially escaped Rowson's attention. Thus in the ensuing months, Rowson strove to make good on the claims featured in the subscription solicitation, to solidify her identity for American readers (and especially for those in Philadelphia and in Baltimore, where the New Theatre company would perform during the summer and early fall months) as the "Author of *Victoria*, *Inquisitor*, *Charlotte*, *Fille de Chambre*, &c. &c." The *Trials* subscription proposal also makes clear that Rowson was not an unwilling dupe of the "pirate" Mathew Carey, but had rather established a business relationship with him that preceded, and in fact led to, his first Philadelphia edition of *Charlotte*. Crucially, the subscription proposal for *Trials of the Human Heart* also marks the first time Rowson publicly claimed authorship of *Charlotte*. If Rowson had not thus personally attached her name to this novel, no one in Philadelphia—Carey included—would have had any way of knowing that she had written it, the British edition having been published completely anonymously. Absent her claim of authorship, no public association between "Mrs. Rowson" and her novel existed. Moreover, since the novel's market value at the moment of its first American edition clearly depended on Rowson's public identity as an actress on the Philadelphia stage, the nearly two hundred subsequent American editions of *Charlotte* published in cities and towns across the United States—authorized or not—would almost certainly have not appeared without the recent immigrant publicly proclaiming herself to be "Mrs. Rowson, of the New Theatre, Author of . . . *Charlotte*."

Although *Trials* was not ultimately published until the spring of 1795, editions of *Charlotte*, *Mentoria*, and *The Fille de Chambre* and a second edition of *The Inquisitor* all appeared in Philadelphia by the end of 1794,

with *Victoria* and *The Test of Honour* being her only London novels not reprinted. In 1794, Mathew Carey's roles as publisher of *Charlotte* and supporter of the *Trials* subscription drive also intertwined. In that period, Carey was transitioning from printer-publisher to one of America's first "pure" publishers—that is, he increasingly farmed printing work out to others while focusing his efforts on book marketing and distribution.²⁶ He thus contracted the printing of *Charlotte* to another local printer, Daniel Humphreys. Carey advertised the novel as "A New Novel To the LADIES of Philadelphia . . . By Mrs. Rowson, of the New Theatre, Philadelphia, author of *Victoria*, the *Inquisitor*, *Fille de Chambre*, &c.;" it was first available for purchase on April 29, 1794, "Price, bound, five-eighths of a dollar, sewed in marble paper, half a dollar" (Carey, Advertisement, *Gazette*). On May 1, along with his "regards," Carey sent Rowson ten copies of his edition of *Charlotte*, promising to send more in a few days. Around May 19, he did just that, reporting in his letter, "I have the pleasure to inform you that I have 89 copies of your book [*Trials of the Human Heart*] subscribed for, exclusive of my own 20." He also enclosed "a bank check for 20 dollars, as a small acknowledgement for the copy right of *Charlotte*" and "ten copies of the book bound."²⁷

In the context of American copyright law's promotion of reprinting of foreign-authored works, Carey's twenty dollar payment "for the copy right of *Charlotte*," combined with an in-kind payment of twenty bound copies of her novel (retail value of twelve and a half dollars) is puzzling. However, the statute was only one factor shaping Carey's transaction with Rowson. Had Carey had easy access to copies of the 1791 Minerva Press edition of *Charlotte*—as Davidson and others (following R. W. G. Vail) have erroneously deduced based on a misreading of a key piece of evidence—he would have had less incentive to compensate Rowson for reprinting. But while Thomas Allen of New York and William P. Blake of Boston advertised the availability of a novel called *Charlotte* in 1792 (Blake also advertised *Victoria* and *Mentoria*), Carey's August catalog the same year advertised a novel titled *Miss Temple* (Vail 77; *Carey Catalog*).²⁸ Eighteenth-century book catalogs are notoriously cryptic, often providing only abbreviated titles and no author's name, even when a book was *not* anonymous, as *Charlotte* was. While Vail apparently assumed *Miss Temple* was a variant title for the novel later known as *Charlotte Temple*, it was almost certainly not. William Lane published Rowson's novel under the title *Charlotte: A Tale of Truth*, and it

did not become known as *Charlotte Temple* (a title change that added the eponymous heroine's surname) until Carey's third American edition of 1797. It is highly unlikely that Carey would have retitled the London *Charlotte* "Miss Temple" for the purpose of his sales catalog. Furthermore, a much more likely candidate exists for the *Miss Temple* Carey offered for sale in 1792: *The History of Miss Temple*, "By a Young Lady" who signed the novel's preface "A. Rogers." This *Miss Temple* was published in London in 1777, and reprinted in Dublin the same year. In 1792, when *Miss Temple* appeared in his catalog, Carey had recently reopened his shop after devoting most of his attention for several years to his magazine the *American Museum* (which failed) (Schwaab 25). Furthermore, he was just beginning to establish relationships with booksellers in London (having in the late 1780s imported books only from booksellers in his native Ireland). The presence of this obscure fifteen-year-old epistolary novel on Carey's shelves in 1792 suggests nothing more ordinary than Carey having had worthless back stock dumped on him by a bookseller in London or Dublin. Not surprisingly, many of the other novels listed alongside *Miss Temple* in Carey's modest catalog are similarly outmoded fare. Contrary to common critical assumptions, Carey did not have *Charlotte* in his shop in 1792; and more broadly, he had neither the liberty to pick and choose from among the latest Minerva novels for reprinting nor the wherewithal to offer such titles for sale in their original London editions.

Even if Carey had obtained a copy of *Charlotte* before Rowson's arrival in Philadelphia, it is highly unlikely that he would have reprinted it. Before 1794, Carey showed scant interest in importing or publishing novels at all. While scholars have characterized Carey as early America's most notorious book "pirate" and the reprinting of recent London novels as his business as usual, Carey's edition of *Charlotte* was actually his first reprint of a recent London novel.²⁹ Like many other American publishers in the early 1790s, he issued an abridged Richardson novel—*The History of Sir Charles Grandison, Abridged from the Works of Samuel Richardson, Esquire*, under the joint imprint of Carey, Stewart, and Co. in 1790 (Clarkin 11). However, this abridgment of an established classic was the *only* London novel issued under Carey's imprint before 1794. Prior to this, Carey had in fact demonstrated a vigorous distaste for imported copies of British novels. In 1788, when Dublin bookseller Patrick Byrne consigned a large lot of books to Carey for sale, including a liberal selection of novels, Carey protested,

“When . . . you mean to supply the American market with literary food, let it be of the most solid and substantial kind; history, voyages, philosophy, science, and well chosen school books” (qtd. in Kinane 318).³⁰ Reprinting *Charlotte* represented a significant departure for Carey, a departure linked to Rowson's presence on the Philadelphia stage, as well as his business ties to husband and wife. By 1794, Carey's imports from Byrne and others had increased exponentially from his previous ventures in the late 1780s (Kinane 321–23), and more recent British novels had made their way into his shop. His March 1794 catalog, much larger overall than his 1792 catalog, features more novels, including a small proportion first published in London in the 1780s and early 1790s (*Mathew Carey's Catalogue* 44–50). Nevertheless, it is clear that when Susanna Rowson personally offered Mathew Carey a copy of *Charlotte*, and suggested that he issue an American edition of the relatively short two-volume novel featuring American scenes and incidents, the copy would have been a commodity worth paying for, considering both the scarcity of imported copies and the value added by her bodily presence in Philadelphia.

While Carey's compensation to Rowson was modest, it is worth considering in the context of what London publishers typically offered her. While Rowson received £30 from Robinson for *Inquisitor* (approximately \$133) and perhaps a little less from Lane for *Charlotte*, Carey paid her \$20 and twenty copies of her novel, representing a total value of \$32.50.³¹ Although Carey paid her considerably less than her London publishers, the amount was not insignificant—and notably the American copyright law did not compel him to pay her at all. Though Carey ostensibly paid Rowson “for the copy right of *Charlotte*,” the law did not (as Carey was well aware) allow him to gain rights over the novel; instead, he paid Rowson as a gesture of good faith rather than as a fulfillment of a legal obligation. The transaction is equally extraordinary from Rowson's side—though she had legally transferred the copyright in *Charlotte* to William Lane in London under the provisions of the English law and had no right recognized by the American law, she nevertheless got paid for it a second time in Philadelphia. Furthermore, although no record of Rowson's weekly salary from the New Theatre survives, evidence of compensation to other actors on the American stage in the 1790s suggests that Carey's total payment to Rowson “for the copy right” of *Charlotte* was greater than her weekly salary from the New Theatre.³²

Soon after Carey sent Rowson \$20 and twenty copies of the novel, Carey wrote to William Lane in London, enclosing a letter from Susanna Rowson, “who has informed me, that you have a large quantity of novels which you would sell at a very low rate. I wish to know your terms, which, if acceptable, may lead to a beneficial correspondence.” Rowson’s recommendation failed to help Carey establish an ongoing business relationship with Lane. However, Carey’s attempt to use his relationship with Rowson to establish a direct relationship with her London publisher is telling in and of itself, as it testifies both to a perceptible shift in Carey’s commercial interest in fiction seemingly spurred by his relationship with Rowson, and to the continuing challenges facing American booksellers who wanted to import London novels. Recall that Lane issued a full third of all new novels published in London in the 1790s—it would be difficult to offer readers in Philadelphia a good selection of London novels without his cooperation. Indeed, Carey’s decision to compensate Rowson for his edition of *Charlotte* even though the law did not obligate him to do so may have been part of a quid pro quo with Rowson—in return for compensating her for his American edition, she gave him a letter of reference to Lane. A few years later, Hocquet Caritat’s position as the preeminent lender and retailer of novels in New York was enabled, in part, precisely by the sort of ongoing relationship with Lane’s Minerva Press that Carey failed to establish in Philadelphia in 1794.³³

While the circumstances under which other Philadelphia editions of Rowson’s novels appeared are not as well documented, evidence suggests that she played some role in arranging these editions as well. Henry and Patrick Rice, for instance, were not only involved in the *Trials of the Human Heart* subscription drive but also brought out an edition of *The Fille de Chambre* under a joint imprint with James Rice in Baltimore. Henry and Patrick offered the novel for sale in Philadelphia on August 1, 1794 (Advertisement), while James offered the novel for sale simultaneously in Baltimore (Advertisement). Notably, a reader of the Rice edition would have found the subscription proposal for *Trials* suggestively bound into her copy of *Fille de Chambre*. Robert Campbell’s edition of *Mentoria* (printed by Samuel Harrison Smith) was in press by early July (Advertisement, *Philadelphia Gazette*) and available for sale by mid-August (Advertisement, *Gazette of the United States*). Although Robert Campbell’s name does not appear in the original subscription proposal for *Trials*, his brother

Samuel in New York was a subscription agent there, and Robert ultimately appeared on the title page of the novel as one of the publishers producing and selling it for Rowson. Finally, Mathew Carey undertook the publication of a "handsome" "Second American Edition" of *The Inquisitor* (price 87½¢), available in October 1794 (Advertisement, *Philadelphia Gazette*). Carey's *Inquisitor* appeared shortly before he issued the "Second American edition" of *Charlotte* in November, priced at 75¢, up from the first edition's 62½¢. Carey commissioned printer William Gibbons, whose "First American Edition" of *The Inquisitor* sank into oblivion in 1793, to print his second American edition.³⁴ In November, his advertisements for this second American edition of *Charlotte* proclaimed, "the rapid sale of the first edition of this interesting novel, in a few months, is the best proof of its merit" (Advertisement, *Philadelphia Gazette*). Whether or not Rowson received compensation from Campbell or Rice for their editions or additional compensation from Carey, the appearance of these reprints in the wake of the subscription drive for *Trials*, Carey's first edition of *Charlotte*, and Rowson's emergence as a prominent figure on the Philadelphia stage suggests that the reprints were part of a coordinated effort promoting Rowson's dual American careers, an effort promising financial rewards for Rowson and all of the publishers backing her.

In June, just before the New Theatre company ended its first Philadelphia season, Rowson further integrated her roles as writer and actress, becoming, for the first time, a playwright. Her play *Slaves in Algiers* was first performed on June 30, 1794, advertised as "Mr. and Mrs. Rowson's Night," a benefit performance for husband and wife (New Theatre, Advertisement, *Gazette*). Benefit nights were a key component of early American theater, a contractual perquisite that could substantially supplement a player's regular salary.³⁵ All profits went to the named beneficiaries, who were thus responsible for selling their own tickets. Those who had purchased a subscription for *Trials of the Human Heart* in the spring would have found themselves returning to the same location, "the corner of Seventh and Chesnut Streets," to obtain tickets "of Mr. and Mrs. Rowson." As the *Philadelphia Gazette* commented, "The lovers of the novelties of the drama must be highly gratified" by the first performance of "a new comedy, called the Slaves in Algiers, for the benefit of the authoress." Obliging attention to the transatlantic nature of Rowson's career, the *Gazette* continues, "Mrs. Rowson's celebrity for the various productions of her pen has

been acknowledged by all the literary reviewers of the old world—and we are happy to find she has lost nothing of her well earned merits in the estimation of the public in the western hemisphere. If we may judge from what we have already seen of her works, we hope the attractions of the comedy will ensure her the presence of her numerous well wishers” (Untitled). Among other things, the *Gazette’s* references to Rowson’s reputation via “literary reviewers of the old world” and “what we have seen of her works” indicate that in late June 1794, editions of most of her novels were not yet available to Philadelphia readers.

Soon after “Mr. and Mrs. Rowson’s Night,” the Rowsons and the entire company departed for Baltimore, not to return to Philadelphia until December. This migration helps to explain the considerable delay in the publication of *Trials of the Human Heart*. Since the novel was a self-financed venture, Rowson could not simply leave the arrangements to others, but had to actively supervise production. Selling enough subscriptions to generate the necessary capital also proved a challenge. By late April, subscription advertisements began carrying a cautionary statement: “Mrs. Rowson begs leave to inform her friends and the public in general that on account of the heavy expence attending the publication of this work, it cannot be put to press till she has obtained 300 subscribers” (Advertisement, *General Advertiser*).³⁶ This suggests she needed the substantial sum of six hundred dollars in hand just to cover materials and labor costs. When the Rowsons and the rest of the New Theatre company returned to Philadelphia in December, though there were apparently fewer than three hundred subscribers in place, the long work of typesetting and printing the very long *Trials* nevertheless commenced. Rowson contracted with Wrigley & Berriman for the typesetting and printing of the first two volumes (volumes 3 and 4 were printed by Mountford, Bioren, and Co.), but she also drew on the material resources of Mathew Carey. William Rowson was no longer prompter for the New Theatre, but he kept busy shepherding his wife’s novel through the press, toting quires of paper from Carey’s shop to Wrigley and Berriman’s in December, January, and February.³⁷ While the law of coverture certainly limited Susanna Rowson’s agency as an author, in 1794 and 1795 the Rowsons seem to have been engaged in a productive collaboration, acting in concert to advance her stage and print careers. Since Susanna was too busy with her acting to supervise her novel’s production, her husband dutifully took on the project’s management. Her marriage turned itself into a busi-

ness asset in another way. Although as “public women,” actresses were haunted by another class of “public women” sometimes associated with the theater (namely prostitutes),³⁸ as “Mrs. Rowson,” Susanna could claim a level of respectability “Miss Haswell” could not have. Unlike most other women in her community, she could stand outside a theater and sell subscriptions for her novel or tickets to the benefit performance of her play with social immunity, safe under the cover of her husband’s surname and their joint identity as a married theatrical couple.

By the end of 1794, Susanna had enough additional cash on hand to pay Wrigley and Berriman to print an edition of *Slaves in Algiers* “as performed at the New Theatres in Philadelphia and Baltimore”—a much less expensive enterprise than printing *Trials*. “[P]rinted for the author,” it was available for sale for twenty-five cents as early as December 17 from Mathew Carey, H. and P. Rice, and “all the booksellers in Philadelphia” (Rowson, Advertisement, *Aurora General Advertiser*). Scaled back from her original design, *Trials of the Human Heart* finally appeared in June 1795, in “four volumes bound in two,” the cost only two dollars rather than the initially projected four dollars (Rowson, Advertisement, *Dunlap’s Daily*). As a U.S. resident at the time she wrote them, Rowson was entitled to copyright protection for both *Slaves* and *Trials*, and did in fact register copyrights under her own name in the Philadelphia federal district court on December 23, 1794, and April 14, 1795, respectively (Gilreath 22–23, 27).³⁹

From 1794 through mid-1796, when book title pages listed a novel’s author as “Mrs. Rowson, of the New Theatre, Philadelphia,” the named author actually *was* performing on the Philadelphia stage for several months out of the year. For decades thereafter, although the twinned figures of stage actress and novel author began to separate in reality, they remained conjoined on title pages. Susanna Rowson brought her association with the New Theatre to a close in 1796, when she and several of the other actors joined the Federal Street Theatre, a new company in Boston. Susanna Rowson’s correspondence in January and May 1796 with her half-brother Robert Haswell, then living in Boston, shows that she contemplated leaving the New Theatre months before her actual departure (Parker 16–17). On June 11, 1796, J. B. Williamson, the proprietor of the Federal Street Theatre, announced in the Boston papers that he had secured a company, including Susanna and William Rowson (Advertisement, *Federal Orrey*, June). The Rowsons performed in Baltimore with the New Theatre company during

the summer of 1796 (Advertisement, *Federal Gazette*), but by October, they were on stage in Boston (Advertisement, *Federal Orrey*, October).

Before the Rowsons could depart Philadelphia for good, however, they and Mathew Carey needed to balance two years of outstanding accounts. In August 1796, Carey prepared an accounting, placing (in accordance with coverture) William Rowson's name, rather than Susanna's, at the head of the document.⁴⁰ In addition to the quires of paper William obtained from Carey in late 1794 and early 1795 for the printing of *Trials of the Human Heart*, Carey charged William for five copies of *Charlotte* and six of the *Inquisitor* on June 23, 1795 (William may have intended to sell copies of these novels in Baltimore when the company began its season in July). On the other side of the ledger, Carey owed William for printed songs sold at the theater, and for an additional 66 copies of *Trials of the Human Heart* delivered to Carey in May, July, and December 1795. In 1796, Carey divested the Rowsons of a large number of unsold copies of *Trials* and *Slaves in Algiers* then in their possession, taking them in several batches during their final months in Philadelphia. In total, Carey received 350 copies of *Trials*, many of them in unbound sheets, and over 600 copies of *Slaves*. Carey, in turn, compensated William Rowson for the balance in his favor, paying in cash, informal financial instruments (notes in hand and acceptances), printed copies of songs (easily transportable, which William Rowson could sell at the theater in Boston), and stationery goods. Within a year of leaving Philadelphia, Susanna left the Federal Street Theatre as well, to establish herself as an educator of girls and young women around Boston.

Mathew Carey continued, of course, to produce and sell editions of *Charlotte* (eventually *Charlotte Temple*) well into the nineteenth century, although he began identifying the novel's author as "Mrs. Rowson, *Late* of the New Theatre, Philadelphia" (emphasis added), and editions by other publishers proliferated. His accounts include no further entries for William or Susanna Rowson after 1796, but this absence signifies no sustained injustice toward either Susanna or William. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, arrangements between authors and publishers in both England and the United States seldom involved ongoing payments to authors based on sales or profits (i.e., royalties).⁴¹ Legally speaking, Rowson had no U.S. copyright in *Charlotte* to convey to Carey; nevertheless, Carey's letters to Rowson make it clear that their understanding was

based on the most common model of author-publisher relations for works that *were* protected by copyright—in return for a one-time payment, the author transferred the “right in the copy” to a publisher, and the publisher assumed all financial risks as well as rewards (if any rewards existed after he had covered the cost of the edition, including his “copyright” payment to the author). Etymologically, the *copy* in *copyright* is a noun, signifying the right *in* copy, rather than a verb, the right *to* copy; traditionally, the “copy” is the author’s manuscript, and the author transferred the manuscript and the right to print it to a publisher.⁴² In the case of *Charlotte*, Carey paid for the “right” to a printed London edition of *Charlotte* as if it were an unpublished manuscript. As Camryn Hansen’s comparative textual analysis of the London and Philadelphia editions of the novel points out, revisions to the Philadelphia edition are far more extensive than has generally been assumed. Together, the publication history reconstructed here and Hansen’s textual analysis make a very strong case for Rowson herself being responsible for many of these changes. A printed copy of the London edition, with revisions for the American market made in the author’s hand, may thus have gained new life as a manuscript copy.

This essay does not ultimately recover a version of Rowson’s career as a print author in which she triumphs over a national American market, however. While Rowson achieved something remarkable in Philadelphia from 1794 to 1796 when she merged her interests as actress and author, her innovative strategy had significant limits. When Rowson left the theater for good in 1797, she could no longer draw on her theatrical notoriety to promote the sale of her novels; and even before then, her strategy could not succeed on a national scale. When she advertised her subscription proposal for *Trials of the Human Heart* in 1794, she imagined something like a national audience for the novel, having made arrangements, as we noted earlier, for booksellers in New York, Boston, Vermont, Annapolis, Baltimore, and Charleston to accept subscriptions. However, the 133 subscribers whose names were published with the novel in 1795 are confined entirely to the geographical bounds of the first year of her theatrical career. Her patron Anne Bingham subscribed for 26 copies, while the five collaborating Philadelphia booksellers accounted for 106 copies, leaving 111 individual subscribers committed to purchasing 127 copies. Of those 111 subscribers, about two-thirds resided in the Annapolis and Baltimore vicinities, and only one-third in or around Philadelphia, including New

Jersey. With several Philadelphia booksellers committed to prepurchasing 20 copies each and Anne Bingham able to bestow her 26 copies on the members of her social circle, Philadelphians had little incentive to subscribe in advance rather than simply waiting for the novel to appear in bookstores. As Trish Loughran observes, in the early republic, although “many authors and printers dreamed of a mass book market . . . none could locate or serve such an audience across any significant amount of geographic space” (23). Loughran’s analysis of the 1795 subscription publication in Philadelphia of Royall Tyler’s play *The Contrast* applies equally well to Rowson’s subscription publication of *Trials of the Human Heart* in the same city the same year. Despite being “pitched to what their producers hoped would be geographically diverse audiences,” the subscription list for each publication “does not prove the limitless agency of the printed book at hand so much as it follows the mobile but still finite movements of one man [or woman]. . . . [T]he printed subscription list evokes a fantasy of broad textual diffusion *and* serves as a record of the ways in which actual dissemination was imperfect and fragmented” (175).

A full analysis of the fate of *Trials of the Human Heart*, *Charlotte Temple*, and Rowson’s other novels (original and reprinted) on the American market is beyond the scope of this essay. However, we close with a brief glimpse forward to 1812, and to a final letter documenting the later relationship between Susanna Rowson and Mathew Carey. Carey’s letter to Rowson, responding to Rowson’s ambitious plan to publish a collected edition of her works, makes clear how “imperfect and fragmented” the American market for Rowson’s novels remained into the early nineteenth century, even as *Charlotte* achieved the status of a legendary best-seller. Without Carey’s 1794 edition of *Charlotte* and the many subsequent editions under his imprint, *Charlotte* would not have become an American phenomenon. However, the many editions published without Carey’s participation (and, indeed, in many instances, without his knowledge) were also crucial to the novel’s extraordinary market penetration. Throughout his career, although Carey attempted to create truly national networks of distribution for print, these efforts all failed, since even to someone as engaged in such efforts as Carey, segments of the national market remained inaccessible or invisible.⁴³ In his letter of 1812, Carey surveyed the fate of Rowson’s works on the American market. Davidson and many others have quoted this letter in scholarship on Rowson, but only in an inaccurate and partial transcrip-

tion, which happens to omit the crucial opening sentences indicating that Carey was responding directly to a query from Rowson.⁴⁴ We produce the letter here in its entirety as it was copied into Carey's letter book:

April 23, 1812.

S Rowson

Mr. Bliss⁴⁵ has shewn me your letter of the 14th of April, which is now before me. I regret extremely that the shortness of my stay in Boston, & the pressure of my business, prevented me from having the pleasure of waiting on you. I was but two days & a half in the town, & every hour of that time was busily occupied in negotiations with the booksellers. I would be sincerely sorry if my failure of calling were to be ascribed to any want of respect or esteem, which would be doing me a great injustice. Of the books & play you want, I do not have a single copy. Should I meet with any of them I shall forward them to you. Of the success of the republication of your works in the form you mention, I am doubtful. *Mentoria* never was very popular. The sale of *Trials of the heart* have been slow. *Charlotte Temple* is by far the most popular, & in my opinion the most useful novel ever published in this country & probably not inferior to any published in England. The *Fille de chambre* is likewise popular—& the same may be said of *Reuben & Rachel*. If your object be emolument, I apprehend, that the undertaking would not be by any means eligible. If reputation, which is a much more laudable motive, be the object, then the only difficulty will be, to induce a bookseller to engage in it. This does not appear to me impracticable, but may soon be reduced to certainty. It would not by any means answer me to embark in the business, being at present engaged in various undertakings, which require my whole capital & all my exertions.

It must afford you great gratification to know that the sales of *Charlotte Temple* exceed those of the most celebrated novels that ever appeared in England. I think the number disposed of must far exceed 50,000 copies; & the sale still continues. There has lately been published an edition at Hartford, of as I am informed 5000 copies, as a chap book—& I have an edition in the press of 3000, which I shall sell at 50 or 62½ cents.⁴⁶

Susanna Rowson's letter to Carey does not survive, but something of its contents can be deduced from Carey's response. Hearing that Carey was in

Boston, Susanna Rowson, by 1812 a longtime resident of that city, had contacted him with two aims in mind—to secure copies of a particular play and other books and to solicit his assistance in arranging for a collected edition of her works (“the republication of your works in the form you mention”). Indeed, some of the books Rowson hoped to secure may have been her own, published nearly two decades before and, unlike *Charlotte*, no longer widely available. Although Carey had no ongoing financial obligations to Rowson, he is both deferential and frank about the prospects of such an unprecedented—and capital-intensive—project as the issuing of a living author’s collected works.

Despite Carey’s involvement in several efforts to organize national networks for distribution of books, American print culture remained largely regional.⁴⁷ Some of Carey’s statements about sales of Rowson’s books, including *Charlotte*, were necessarily informed guesses rather than secure statements of fact. He might have been able to account accurately for sales of his own editions, but not normally those issued by others, even when he knew about those editions (he knew about the recent Hartford edition of *Charlotte* he reports to Rowson only because he learned about it from correspondence with its publisher, Silas Andrus). In the case of *Trials of the Human Heart*, however, Carey was on firm ground. No second edition of *Trials* ever appeared, and in 1796, Carey had acquired from Rowson hundreds of unsold copies. (Indeed, his claim that sales “have been slow” implies that those unsold copies were still in his stock in 1812.)⁴⁸ Likewise, Carey’s “Second American Edition” of *The Inquisitor* was the last American edition of that title; despite its lack of copyright protection, no publisher in another region had chosen to issue a reprint. Since Carey had no role in the publication of *Reuben and Rachel* (1798), written and published after Rowson moved to Boston, the basis for his conclusion about that novel’s popularity is unclear, as are his conclusions about *Fille de Chambre* and *Mentoria*.

Although Rowson did eventually interest Boston publisher R. P. and C. Williams in bringing out a “corrected and revised” edition of *Fille de Chambre* (retitled *Rebecca, or the Fille de Chambre*) with a new autobiographical introduction in 1814, she never brought to fruition the grander project of her collected works. The still developing and largely regional market for print in Rowson’s adopted nation did not yet seriously entertain such ambitions. Nevertheless, Rowson’s vision as she looks back over her

career as a novelist and seeks to memorialize it is truly audacious. Charles Brockden Brown was honored with a collected edition many years after his death, when Samuel Goodrich issued it in 1827 (reissues by more than one London publisher of Brown's novels made a sort of coincidental collected edition of Brown's novels available to British readers several years earlier in 1822 [Reid, "Brockden Brown"]). Not until 1848, at the dawn of a truly national book market, would a living American author, Washington Irving, have his collected works published (Greenspan 219). Rowson's vision of her own career was also notably transatlantic—she sought to collect not just her novels first published in the United States but works first published on both sides of the Atlantic over more than a decade.

She also set a precedent for future authors' transatlantic negotiations of the literary market. In the mid-1790s, when Susanna Rowson arrived in Philadelphia, the United States was an independent constitutional republic, but it still had strong cultural and linguistic ties to England (thus the New Theatre's importation of British actors). Rowson's particular life history and circumstances (the childhood years in the American colonies, the reimmigration as an adult actress and novelist) were almost certainly unique. Nevertheless, at a moment when the Anglo-American transatlantic market for fiction officially became transnational, she demonstrated that, with initiative and ingenuity and the cooperation of publishers, it was possible for an author to maintain a semblance of control over her works in the two nations. Indeed, the fate of Rowson's subscription publishing scheme for *Trials of the Human Heart* suggests that bridging the gap between the British and America literary markets was roughly equivalent in difficulty to bridging the gap between Philadelphia and Charleston. From the United States as her permanent residence, Rowson evidently negotiated the transatlantic market at least one more time, in the opposite direction, sending her novel *Reuben and Rachel* (first published in Boston in 1798) to London to be reprinted the following year by the Minerva Press, the original publisher of *Mentoria*, *Charlotte*, and *Fille de Chambre*.⁴⁹ Consider Charles Brockden Brown, whose novels first published in New York were reissued in London by the Minerva Press after his New York publisher, Hocquet Caritat, carried them there.⁵⁰ Or consider the English travels and residence by authors such as Washington Irving, James Fenimore Cooper, and Harriet Beecher Stowe, undertaken in part to secure rights to their works on both sides of the Atlantic. As they and their works

crossed the Atlantic, all of these authors, whether they knew it or not, followed in the wake of Rowson's transatlantic career.

NOTES

1. For period images of the New Theatre and the block of Chestnut Street where it was located, see McNamara ch. 7; Wolcott, "Philadelphia's Chestnut Street Theatre" and "Chestnut Street Theatre Project." It is difficult to know precisely how newspaper readers would have interpreted the address in the ad if they wished to find Rowson, although the adjacency to the theater would be unmistakable. The Rowsons are not listed in Philadelphia city directories for the period, which is not surprising considering the annual movement of the company between Pennsylvania and Maryland. They and other actors may have boarded at Bolivar House, next to the theater, which had public rooms on the first floor and may have had lodgings on the second floor. In the 1790s, the street name was most often spelled "Chesnut," and we retain that spelling when quoting from contemporary documents. We thank the numerous scholars and librarians who have provided crucial assistance in their research. Marion Rust introduced us to one another, and James Green shared his matchless knowledge of Mathew Carey and helped us navigate and interpret Carey's publishing records. Members of the Midwest Nineteenth-Century Americanist Group (Kate Adams, John Evelev, Stephanie Fitzgerald, Susan Harris, Laura Mielke, Patricia Okker, and Alexandra Socarides) read and responded to drafts, as did Michael Everton, Marion Rust, and an anonymous reader for *Early American Literature*. Stephen Behrendt, Scott Ellis, Mark Kamrath, and Heather Nathans answered questions and pointed us to crucial resources. We also thank staff at the following libraries: American Antiquarian Society (especially Tom Knoles and Susan Anderson), Library Company of Philadelphia, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Lilly Library, New York Public Library, University of Pennsylvania, University of Virginia, University of Wisconsin, and Harvard University.
2. On the embodied connection between Rowson and her work, see Rust 146. On the connections between local networks and print in the early republic, see Loughran 115. Loughran revises Warner's influential account of a disembodied print public sphere.
3. For instance, Gould reads *Slaves in Algiers* as Rowson's attempt at "imagining newly restored cultural relations" between England and America in the wake of the Revolution (98–99). Dillon analyzes the articulation of a raced and gendered American national identity in the context of transatlantic conflict between America and Africa in *Slaves in Algiers*. Mazzeo reads *Fille de Chambre* and *Charlotte* as conservative reactions against a Romantic transatlanticism allied with revolutionary politics in Europe. Throughout, Rust reads Rowson's works in the context of what she characterizes as a transatlantic culture of gentility and

- sensibility. Doyle reads *Charlotte Temple* as a transatlantic seduction tale embedded in a racialized Atlantic economy (ch. 6). Homestead places Rowson's career and works in the context of an earlier transatlantic emergence and circulation of the "American novel" before the Revolution ("Beginnings"). Bartolomeo characterizes Rowson's life as "genuinely and significantly transatlantic" and *Reuben and Rachel* as "inscrib[ing] a transatlantic 'history' of America in which national identity is both fluid and hybrid" (9, 12).
4. Despite this elegant formulation, Richards actually misstates some key elements of Rowson's biography, claiming that she was born in the American colonies and "lived in England during the Revolution" (22, 143). He also describes her as "the English novelist turned American actress" (143), implying that she had no stage-acting experience in Great Britain.
 5. See Davidson, "The Life and Times," esp 159, 164, 176; "Ideology and Genre" (an earlier version of "Life and Times"); Introduction, esp. xx–xxi, xxiv, xxvii, xxxi; and *Revolution and the Word* 65. For her claims about the consequences of coverture, Davidson relies in particular on entries in Carey's account books, in which, indeed, entries are in William Rowson's name, not Susanna's. As discussed below, some of these entries do testify to the effects of coverture on Susanna's literary properties and earnings. However, others document William's dealings with Carey unrelated to Susanna's novels or the involvement of both Rowsons in Carey's editions of her novels.
 6. For a historical and theoretical discussion focusing primarily on the years after Rowson's death, see Homestead, *American Women Authors*, esp. ch. 1.
 7. Several pre-Davidson scholars also claim that Rowson was responsible for the American editions of her works, but they provide no documentation. See Parker 15, 83; Kirk and Kirk 14; and Brandt vii, 107.
 8. We rely primarily on Parker for verifiable biographical information.
 9. Throughout this essay, we largely bracket the question of Irish reprints of London novels, including Irish reprints of Rowson's novels (*Fille de Chambre* and *Mentoria* were both reprinted in Dublin). Unauthorized Dublin reprints were cheaper than London editions, and American booksellers were eager to import them.
 10. Reviews of Rowson's works are documented in Raven and Forester's magisterial bibliographical survey. Raven's introductory essay, "The Novel Comes of Age," surveys various trade practices, including patronage and dedications, anonymous publication, and publishers' payments to authors. See also Fergus and Thaddeus.
 11. On the title page, her first name is spelled "Susannah."
 12. The case of Rowson also bears out Griffin's observation that Foucault's "author function . . . can be shown to operate quite smoothly in the absence of the author's name" (879), since a title page without an author's name can still serve a classificatory function if other information provided on it links it to other texts.
 13. For many years, no copies of this novel were known to exist, and the title was in-

correctly identified as *Mary; or, A Test of Honour*. For complete title page information based on recently located copies, including Abraham's proprietorship of a circulating library, see Raven and Forester 484. Davidson describes this novel as "one of only two books to which [Rowson] never appended her name, and a work she never publicly claimed as her own" and as "seem[ing] to have been one of Lane's formula novels" ("Life and Times" 159). There is no evidence, however, that John Abraham had any relationship to William Lane, another London publisher.

14. He includes the text of an undated letter declining the privilege so that he could "hold [him]self free to censure or praise as the case may require." On Carey's passion for the theater and a surmised early meeting with Susanna Rowson based on theatrical imprints, see Green, *Mathew Carey* 20–21.
15. These undated documents appear in Carey's account books at vol. 2, no. 499 and no. 668, and refer to the following titles: *Robin Hood*, *Highland Reel*, *Fillet of Bown*, *Deserter*, *Farmer*, *Rosina*, *Castle of Andalusia*, and *Son in Law*. For the relatively unsystematic and informal accounting methods used by Philadelphia publishers in the early republic, see Remer ch. 5, esp. 101–11. Indeed, as Remer's survey makes clear, Carey's "account books" are not really account books in the sense one might expect—a record of money taken in and paid out, indexed by party. Instead, they are a heterogeneous collection of documents, including receipts, originally kept as separate sheets and later bound together for future reference (the American Antiquarian Society has disbound the volumes for conservation purposes, but has maintained their original volume and number designations). Copies of letters from Carey to William Rowson in Carey's letter books establish that their song-vending arrangement was in place by mid-March 1794. An undated letter (labeled only "Monday Evening," but contextually clearly March 1794), informs William Rowson that the songs from *Robin Hood* must be printed in twenty-four pages rather than twelve and must therefore be sold at ten cents. A letter of Mar. 12, 1794, sends along 120 copies of unspecified songs in addition to 300 already sent "for our itinerant Stationers" to sell "between the play and farce."
16. For the centrality of women readers and women's concerns to Philadelphia print culture in the early 1790s, including the *Lady's Magazine*, see Branson ch. 1. Note, however, Kamrath's correction to her claim that Charles Brockden Brown was associated with the magazine (143).
17. Mysteriously, in the printed "signature" to her dedication to Lady Cockburne, Susanna Rowson was renamed "Susan Rowson."
18. See, e.g., Rust, who observes, "While Rowson happened to be in Philadelphia during the time that *Charlotte* was first printed there, many more of Lane's publications were also imported and stocked in the same circulating libraries and bookpeddlers' wagons that carried the so-called 'first best-selling American novel'" (114).
19. Telling in this context is the fact that the only copy of the 1792 London *Fille de*

Chambre currently held by an American library (an incomplete copy, consisting only of vol. 2, at the Lilly Library at Indiana University in Bloomington, IN) was held in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century by an American commercial lending library, the Troy Circulating Library (the library rules are pasted inside the volume—the location in the U.S. is not specified, but the prices for circulating privileges are listed in dollars).

20. Raven's tables tallying republications beyond the first London edition of novels published between 1770 and 1799 support this characterization (36–37). Raven does note an uptick in reprints in the 1790s, including American reprints. However, if the reprints of Rowson's novels—which, as this essay argues, were arranged by Rowson herself—are disaggregated from Raven's tables, the number of American reprints drops significantly, particularly for the early 1790s. Again, Rowson's case is the exception that proves the rule that American booksellers rarely reprinted recent London novels in the early 1790s.
21. See also Remer 90–91.
22. On the wide availability of abridged editions of *Clarissa* in the United States in the late eighteenth century, see Tennenhouse. His insistence that American readers actively preferred such abridgement for ideological reasons ignores, however, the economic forces leading to the wide availability of such abridgements and the rarity of unabridged copies, whether imported or reprinted.
23. On the Bingham, including the Society Hill neighborhood and their relation to the theater, see Branson 133–42, McKenzie 10–12, and Nathans 63–64.
24. Similarly, Rust characterizes Rowson as being “immersed in the traditions of English literary production to the degree that she had attempted to sell her first novel originally published in the United States by subscription” (5).
25. As Remer also makes clear, finding publishers cooperating with one another to publish Rowson's novels should come as no surprise precisely for financial reasons. Copublished books were common (88–89), and Carey was central to several notable efforts to organize the Philadelphia trade so as to minimize competition and accordingly, financial risk (55–65).
26. For this transition in Carey's career and in the Philadelphia trades more broadly, see Remer ch. 3. See also Green, “From Printer to Publisher” and “The Rise of Book Publishing.”
27. This second letter is undated, but the approximate date can be deduced from the context of the other letters copied into the letter book adjacent to it.
28. The same catalog that advertises the availability of “Miss Temple” also includes “Rowson's Poems,” probably Rowson's *Poems on Various Subjects* of 1788. Note, however, that even in the unlikely event that “Miss Temple” really was *Charlotte*, Rowson's anonymity in relation to *Charlotte* would prevent Carey and readers from classifying the volumes under the same author function.
29. This claim is based on a close reading of Clarkin's chronological bibliography of Carey's imprints. In 1794, Carey was involved in an American reprint of a very recent London novel, *The Haunted Priory; or, The Fortunes of the House of*

Rayo (Clarkin 25). The anonymous novel (by Stephen Cullen), appeared under James Bell's London imprint in 1794, and then issued in a New York joint imprint, "Printed by J. Carey [Mathew Carey's brother] for Mathew Carey, Philadelphia" in the same year. This reprint almost certainly appeared later in the year than *Charlotte*, and may speak to Carey's new interest in reprinting London novels sparked by his reprint of *Charlotte*, rather than vice versa. Despite this brief surge of interest in publishing novels on Carey's part, he published only about a dozen titles after 1794 (not counting his multiple editions of one title, *Charlotte*).

30. Bennett analyzes the ways that the political philosophy of *Charlotte* and some of Rowson's other novels dovetailed with Carey's own. Bennett's analysis reinforces the point that Carey (a fellow immigrant) gravitated particularly toward Rowson's works, not necessarily novels of the period in general.
31. The copies of the novel should be understood as fully part of her compensation, not just a polite gesture. In Silver's survey of relationships between printers and authors in the U.S. during the period, he found many authors who were not compensated at all, and others for whom printed copies of their books were the *only* compensation (ch. 4). As McCusker explains, the standard seventeenth- and eighteenth-century ratio of British pounds sterling to dollars was 4s 6d to \$1 (33). As he also explains, by 1791, the U.S. had declared the dollar as its national monetary unit, in essence adopting Spain's dollar coin (which had a highly stable value) as its own, while issuing no national paper currency. Our calculation of the dollar value (essentially an internationally understood, stable value) of £30 sterling is thus based on the rationale McCusker cites.
32. Blakey surveys evidence of compensation to Minerva authors and deduces an average of £30 (73–75). However, her average includes the early nineteenth century, when, she further surmises, compensation rose.
33. Caritat first established relations with Lane on a trip to London in 1800, strengthening those relations during an 1801–02 trip, when he became Lane's official agent in the United States (Raddin, *Hoquet Caritat* 29, 89, 122).
34. For documentation of Gibbons's printing work, see receipt no. 252, dated Nov. 20, 1794, in Carey's account books. A few titles appear under Gibbons's imprint in 1794, but his imprint and all traces of his printing business disappear thereafter. See Brown and Brown 450. His career ran from 1792 to 1794, and thus he escapes Remer's appendix of Philadelphia printers with imprints in 1790 and 1795 (152–53).
35. Dudden estimates that benefit nights could "amount to one-third of a player's annual salary" (13). McKenzie discusses the specifics of benefits at the Chestnut Street Theatre (131–33).
36. As Remer explains, such statements became common after many subscription publishing schemes failed to result in an actual publication (18–19).
37. Vol. 5, no. 1554, and vol. 6, no. 1918, in the Carey account books document the transfer of quires of paper to William Rowson. See also similar transactions

- documented in the summary account, discussed in more detail below, at vol. 8, no. 2943.
38. As Dudden observes, married couples were the norm in early national theaters (11–12). Dudden also discusses the anxiety about the potential crossover between acting and prostitution for women (21–23).
 39. The extended time line for the production of *Trials* reconstructed here makes a reading of the novel itself in relation to political attacks on Susanna Rowson untenable. Fichtelberg reads the novel as a response to the attacks of William Cobbett (“Peter Porcupine”) on Rowson and her politics, even claiming her subscription publication scheme as part of her strategic response to his slander. However, Cobbett’s attack was published in March 1795 (Parker 73), nearly a year after she first advertised the subscription publication of the novel and months after printing had begun. Her *preface* to the novel responds to Cobbett’s then *very recent* attack, but she clearly wrote the preface—and presented it for typesetting and printing—after the text of the novel proper had already been printed.
 40. The accounting appears in the Carey account books at vol. 8, no. 2943. Although Carey paid Rowson and priced her works in dollars, he kept his accounts in pounds, almost certainly Pennsylvania pounds, not pounds sterling. On this confusing practice (which was nevertheless well understood and transparent by the parties in the early republic), see McCusker 82–88.
 41. As Raven notes, “The right to reproduce a book was almost always bought outright by the bookseller-publisher or consortium of booksellers. The author surrendered all claims to subsequent entitlement” (86). See also Fergus and Thaddeus: “The modern system of royalty payments . . . was not yet practiced” (193). On the American side, see Silver.
 42. The word *copyright* preceded the 1710 enactment of the Statute of Anne, the first English copyright statute. Under the licensing and trade regulation scheme controlled by the Stationer’s Company, an author sold to a publisher his “copy” or manuscript, and a publisher then registered that copy in the Stationers Register, thereby putting other publishers on notice of his sole right to publish the copy (that is, he registered his copyright). As Patterson and Lindberg note, the assumption that the *copy* in *copyright* is a verb (the right *to* copy) rather than a noun (the right *in a* copy) is a modern misstatement of history (22).
 43. See Remer ch. 6 as well as Loughran (15–21) on Carey’s failed attempts to establish a truly “national” magazine.
 44. Davidson and others rely on a partial transcription in Bradsher (50).
 45. Bliss may have been Boston printer and bookseller Elam Bliss, who, reversing Carey’s journey, could have been visiting booksellers in Philadelphia on business; however, the letter provides inadequate information for a definitive identification.
 46. Contractions in the original have been silently expanded.
 47. On the persistent regionalism of the American market for books into the antebellum era, in addition to Loughran see McGill.

48. Twenty years later when he was retired from active business, he claimed that he published too many copies of each title, "creating a stock above twice the amount that was necessary to carry it on, which lay dead in my warehouse, kept me in a constant state of [financial] embarrassment" (Schwaab 41). Although he did not publish *Trials*, he did take hundreds of copies into his overstocked warehouse.
49. Although Bartolomeo suggests that there is "no evidence" that Rowson was involved with the Minerva edition of *Rueben and Rachel* (35), the history recovered here, including Rowson's role in arranging contact between Lane and Carey, makes Rowson's further contact with Lane in 1798–99 plausible, even probable. Likewise, considering Rowson's revisions of *Charlotte* for the American market, the decision to omit Rowson's original preface to an American audience from the London edition could have been hers as well.
50. Brown reported that Caritat took *Ormond*, *Wieland*, and *Arthur Mervyn* with him to London. See S. W. Reid's textual essays for the scholarly editions of these novels for a discussion of the incomplete evidence of these transactions. Despite the lack of certainty, it is clear that Caritat's trip was essential to at least the Minerva *Ormond*, which used sheets from Caritat's American edition.

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