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The shape of Catharine Sedgwick's career

MELISSA J. HOMESTEAD

Two years before Nina Baym published *Woman's Fiction: A Guide to Novels by and about Women in America, 1820–1870* (1978), which set the agenda for the recovery of nineteenth-century women's fiction, she published *The Shape of Hawthorne's Career* (1976). More than three decades into the revival of nineteenth-century American women's fiction, however, literary historians rarely engage works by women across the range of their careers, as they do the works of their canonical male contemporaries, especially Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville. Instead, women who produced fiction for decades have entered literary history primarily through single novels, for example *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) for Harriet Beecher Stowe. Furthermore, such singular works are read primarily in relation to genres (such as Baym's "woman's fiction," the "domestic novel," or the "sentimental novel") and sociopolitical contexts (such as the debates over slavery, Indian removal, and women's rights), rather than in relation to their authors' bodies of work. In addition, scholarship has focused overwhelmingly on antebellum women's novels, at the expense of short fiction. Literary historians have been more willing to concede that women who produced fiction mostly after the Civil War had true careers and that their works might be most productively considered in the context of an author's entire oeuvre, in part because more women, such as Edith Wharton, began self-consciously fashioning themselves as "serious" artists.¹

Nevertheless, many women who began writing fiction in the antebellum period and continued to be productive for decades were not merely accidental or haphazard producers. Catharine Maria Sedgwick is a case in point. She published her first novel in 1822 and her last in 1857. Her productivity slackened in the 1850s, as aging weakened her eyesight and arthritis made it difficult to write clearly. However, from 1822 through the 1840s, she published multiple works of prose fiction (tales, sketches, novellas, or novels) nearly every year. Despite

this extraordinary record of productivity, Sedgwick regularly appears in literary history as the author of a single work, *Hope Leslie* (1827), her historical novel about relations between the Puritans and the native inhabitants of New England. A few other women authors before and contemporary with Sedgwick had careers as long or nearly as long as hers – Susanna Rowson as antecedent and Lydia Maria Child and Lydia Huntley Sigourney as contemporaries, for example. What was unprecedented and remained unequaled until later in the century, however, was that Sedgwick maintained a focus on the craft of fiction (with occasional forays into non-fiction prose) and remained exclusively a producer, never taking up the work of editing. In contrast, Rowson wrote novels, plays, poetry, and schoolbooks; Child produced a considerable body of non-fiction prose in addition to fiction and devoted much time to editing; and Sigourney was primarily a poet and also often an editor.²

Despite Sedgwick's exceptional record, she is often characterized as a timid and reluctant producer of fiction who lost her ambition and drive in the mid-1830s, retreating into the writing of didactic fiction and domestic advice. Judith Fetterley, for instance, reintroducing Sedgwick and her story "Cacoethes Scribendi" to readers in her influential anthology *Provisions* (1985), writes, "After the publication of *The Linwoods* [1835], Sedgwick stopped writing fiction for twenty years, not to return to the genre until *Married or Single?* (1857), and turned her energies instead to the writing of a series of didactic tales intended to address and solve a variety of social problems." Adopting the hypothesis of another critic, Fetterley suggests that Sedgwick shifted to didacticism in 1835 because she believed that producing "such works fit more comfortably into [her] definition of appropriately feminine behavior than did success as a major novelist" (*Provisions*, 44). In *Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century America* (1984), still a much cited source for biographical information about Sedgwick, Mary Kelley characterizes Sedgwick as "a bewildered, timid, and reluctant passenger" on the voyage of her own literary career who largely "regarded her literary endeavors as a pale substitute for what she believed should be the calling of a true woman. Not surprisingly, then, the woman who became a creator of culture was never able to regard herself as one" (199–200). A decade after *Provisions* appeared, Fetterley pondered the consequences of the recovery work rising concurrently "with the dismantling of the interpretive strategies developed during the 1950s and '60s to establish" the American literary canon, suggesting that "[t]hose interested in nineteenth-century American women writers may need to find ways to revitalize modes of criticism no longer fashionable" in order to secure canonical status for women's writing ("Commentary," 605).

Single-author study as practiced by Baym in *The Shape of Hawthorne's Career* represents just such a powerful old-fashioned tool for revaluing Sedgwick's oeuvre. In *Shape*, Baym protests against the then-prevailing tendency to read Hawthorne's works in isolation from one another, as "an arbitrary collection of works rather than a human sensibility." She proposes that in order to "discover this sensibility it is necessary to study everything he wrote that had a literary purpose – that is, was designed to be published – and to study those works in chronological order, in the context they provide for each other" (7–8). Having conducted such a reading, she finds in Hawthorne's career a "preoccupation . . . with defining a way of writing that could embody the imagination and justify it to a skeptical, practical minded audience." She also finds a significant "conversion" from a commonsense to a romantic approach to the power of the imagination (8). In his early career, Baym explains, Hawthorne adopted a moralizing posture in his fiction to overcome "the general American indifference to the arts, based on their supposed uselessness" (18). Hawthorne, then, "did not write in order to set out his moral beliefs; he set out moral beliefs in order to write" (74).

Five years older than Hawthorne, Sedgwick's years of productivity overlap to a high degree. Her career, however, took a far different "shape." While Sedgwick's letters and journals provide a wealth of evidence concerning her sense of herself as an author – and have provided fodder for characterizations of her as a timid and reluctant one – her fiction itself in its surprising variety and complexity provides the evidence for this essay. Sedgwick's works currently in print in modern editions reside in the first fourteen years of her career, and these works constitute only a fraction of even this fraction of Sedgwick's output. Her authorial scope and ambition appear much broader if we give equal weight to her fictions across subgenres and as they appeared in periodicals and anthologies, not just in books comprising works authored only by her. *Hope Leslie*, for example, gains new resonance in the context of Sedgwick's portrayals of Indians in short stories and episodes of longer works published shortly before and after it. Similarly, her didactic novel-las of the 1830s, regarded fully as fiction rather than somehow not fiction (as Fetterley's claim that Sedgwick "stopped writing fiction" suggests), evidence not a retreat but a commitment, extending back to the beginning of her career, to write fiction for audiences across classes, ages, and literacy levels.

Unlike Hawthorne, Sedgwick was not truly anonymous, even early in her career (Homestead, "Behind the Veil?"). Her work was also always in demand, giving her a clear sense of her audience, or, more accurately, audiences plural.

She did not work her way through a series of personae and literary strategies on her way to achieving authority as a romantic artist. Instead, her motivations and fictional practices invert Hawthorne's priorities: from the beginning, she did not set out her moral beliefs in order to write; she wrote in order to promote a particular vision of morality. Indeed, she envisioned writing itself as form of benevolent action. With a clear sense of literary art as useful, she ranged across subgenres, narrative strategies, audiences, and themes.

A narrative account of her fiction of 1822 to 1835 amply demonstrates that a complex combination of consistency and variety, not decline or retreat, defined Sedgwick's career as a writer of fiction. Sedgwick's relatively short first novel, *A New-England Tale*, depicts the trials and triumphs of orphaned Jane Elton in a village setting and appeared in May 1822. Two months later, the New York Unitarian Book Society published as a pamphlet her short moral tale *Mary Hollis*, about a mother forced to raise her children alone after she loses her husband to intemperance.³ It took Sedgwick two years to complete her first two-volume novel, *Redwood* (1824), an elaborately plotted novel of manners featuring another orphaned heroine in rural New England who triumphs over adversity. The next year saw the publication of two new works, one published separately as a book, the other published in a multi-author anthology. The book-length *The Travellers: A Tale Designed for Young People* was her first work specifically for children; its two child protagonists travel through upstate New York and French Canada, learning the value of benevolent action by observing it and then practicing it themselves. "The Catholic Iroquois" was Sedgwick's first story published in an illustrated annual literary anthology (or "gift book"), *The Atlantic Souvenir*, the first American volume published in this style already popularized in Europe. Sedgwick's tale features two converted Indian sisters in seventeenth-century French Canada, one of whom becomes a nun, the other of whom marries a white Frenchman. Culminating in the martyrdom of the married sister at the hands of her own father, the sisters' story is framed by the tale of an early nineteenth-century traveler in the region. In 1826, while Sedgwick was researching and writing *Hope Leslie*, she again published only shorter works, splitting her attention between adult and child audiences. "Modern Chivalry," a historical tale set during the era of the American Revolution and featuring a young British noblewoman who cross-dresses as a sailor, appeared in the *Atlantic Souvenir*, while a Boston Unitarian tract enterprise published *The Deformed Boy*, a pamphlet-length tale for children.

In 1827, Sedgwick began contributing to Lydia Maria Child's *Juvenile Miscellany*, to which she would contribute eight tales and sketches by 1834. *Hope Leslie*

appeared in July 1827, and "Romance in Real Life" appeared in the gift book *The Legendary* at the end of the year. In the latter, a frame tale about travelers in contemporary western Massachusetts introduces a story of confused and masked identities during the Revolutionary War and its aftermath. Sedgwick published only a single *Juvenile Miscellany* story in 1828, but she published two tales in the *Miscellany* in 1829. In the same year, she began her association with an annual gift book for children, *The Youth's Keepsake*, with the publication of "The Elder Sister," a tale about the heroine's devotion to her motherless younger siblings and the deferral of romance and marriage. In the same year, Sedgwick also published two gift book stories for adults, "Cacoethes Scribendi," about the effect of gift books and the craze for authorship among the women of a New England village, and "The Country Cousin," yet another tale embedding a Revolutionary war-era romance in a contemporary frame.

Although Sedgwick lived in New York for part of every year in the 1820s, her fiction of that decade focuses insistently on her native New England, with excursions, mirroring her own touristic travel, to northern New York and French Canada. Her New York novel of manners *Clarence; or, A Tale of Our Own Times* (1830), split between New York City and rural regions north of it, marked a significant new focus in her fiction on New York and contemporary urban life. Nevertheless, Sedgwick also published two New England historical tales in gift books in 1830, "Mary Dyre," a fictionalized account of the actual seventeenth-century Quaker martyred by the Puritans, and "A Story of Shay's War," a tale embedding a fictional romance in the context of the actual late eighteenth-century post-Revolutionary conflict in Western Massachusetts. Sedgwick also published "The Canary Family," an animal parable for children, in the *Youth's Keepsake*.

If one focuses exclusively on single-authored books, Sedgwick's productivity might appear to drop off precipitously in the early 1830s; however, she published multiple tales and sketches each year in gift books and the *Juvenile Miscellany*. In 1831, she published two more gift book tales. "Berkeley Jail," set c.1800 in Massachusetts and based on actual events, features Sam Whistler, a solitary Oneida Indian living on the outskirts of a white village. Wrongly convicted of murdering a prominent white citizen, he is rescued from jail by a white friend whose family was also dispossessed of its land by the murdered man. Unlike the plot-driven and historical "Berkeley Jail," Sedgwick's other gift book tale of 1831, "A Sketch of a Blue Stocking," is a character sketch of a woman embodying a contemporary type, a married woman who successfully combines authorship with domesticity. In 1832, Sedgwick published "Spring in the City" in the *Miscellany*, her first fiction for children set in New York

City, as well as two works of fiction for adults. The gift book story "The Bridal Ring" tells the sad story of a poor and unprotected young woman from New England, who, persuaded to marry a southern gentleman privately and informally, dies of a broken heart when he leaves her and asks for his ring back so he can marry another. Sedgwick was the only woman solicited to contribute to the *Tales of Glauber Spa* anthology, in which her novella-length "Le Bossu," a historical romance set in the court of Charlemagne in the eighth century, appeared (the other tales were by William Cullen Bryant, James Kirke Paulding, William Leggett, and Robert Sands). Sedgwick departs from her earlier exclusive focus on American subject matter, but "Le Bossu" nevertheless returns to a favorite theme: true lovers separated by political conflict. In addition to two *Miscellany* tales, 1833 saw the appearance of two gift book stories, "Old Maids," which takes the form of a dialogue between a married woman and teenage girl about the lives of exemplary single women, and "A Reminiscence of Federalism," which, like "A Story of Shay's War," weds a romance plot to a tale of political conflict in rural New England during the early years of the American republic.

In 1834, Sedgwick published only one *Miscellany* tale and one gift book tale, "St. Catharine's Eve," a historical romance set in medieval France. However, her low productivity can be accounted for by the extraordinary number of works that appeared in 1835. The book-length *Home* appeared in July. Although considerably shorter than her two-volume novels (*Hope Leslie*, *Redwood*, and *Clarence*), *Home* is only somewhat shorter than *A New-England Tale* and is precisely the same length as *The Travellers*. Solicited by Unitarian minister Henry Ware for his series *Scenes and Characters Illustrating Christian Truths*, *Home* focuses on the Barclays, a family of modest means in New York City. *The Linwoods*, a two-volume historical novel set in New York City during the American Revolution, appeared in August, and *Tales and Sketches*, collecting eleven of her fourteen gift book tales, appeared later in 1835. Three new gift book tales also appeared late in the year. The title character of "Amy Cranstoun," set in seventeenth-century Rhode Island, is taken captive by Indians, while "New Year's Day," set in contemporary New York City, features the model conduct of Lizzy Percival, whose forbearance and benevolence make her father relent in his opposition to a marriage proposal from a man she loves. "The Unpresuming Mr. Hudson," the lead tale in the same volume of *The Gift* in which Edgar Allan Poe's "Manuscript Found in a Bottle" first appeared, moves south to Virginia and features "the trials of a pretty young girl who is chaperoned to watering-places by a silly, expecting, and credulous mother" (38). Finally, in 1835 Sedgwick published her first work for adults to appear in a magazine as

opposed to a gift book, "Our Burial Place." Combining elements of the essay and the sketch, Sedgwick gives a factual account in the *Knickerbocker Magazine* of her family's burial plot in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Clearly, 1835 marked anything but a falling off for Sedgwick as an author of fiction – indeed, it marked the most productive year of her career to that point, with her works traversing multiple themes, genres, audiences, and publication venues.

From this survey of her works published from 1822 to 1835, several thematic clusters emerge, linking Sedgwick's imagination more firmly and complexly to sociopolitical contexts than her novels treated in isolation would suggest. Carolyn Karcher's sustained attention to *all* of Lydia Maria Child's fiction in *First Woman in the Republic* (1994), her cultural biography of Child, has encouraged subsequent scholars to situate *Hobomok* (1824), Child's novel of Indian–white intermarriage in seventeenth-century Massachusetts, in relation to her short stories on similar themes. In contrast, *Hope Leslie*, which also features intermarriage, is taken to be Sedgwick's only foray into the genre, even though for more than a decade her literary imagination was preoccupied with white–Indian relations, and especially interracial marriage and friendship, in Massachusetts, northern New York, and French Canada.⁴ In the 1820s, Indian characters are central to the gift book tales "The Catholic Iroquois" and "Berkeley Jail," while the longer *Travellers* features an extended inset tale of two generations of interracial romance, the marriage of a Frenchman to an Oneida woman, and the subsequent romance between their mixed-race, Europeanized daughter and a full-blood Oneida warrior. Indian captivity is central to *Hope Leslie* and Sedgwick's last Indian story, "Amy Cranstoun." Notably, *Redwood* earlier featured a variation on the Indian captivity theme: a devious white Shaker man hires Sooduck, a lone Indian living on the margins of white society, to hold as a prisoner for him the young white woman he has abducted from the Shaker community. "Berkeley Jail" and *Redwood* both include lone Indian figures in early nineteenth-century Western Massachusetts, separated from their tribes (implicitly removed west), "who," Sedgwick says in *Redwood*, "like the remnants of their sacrifice-rocks, remain among us monuments of past ages" (2: 74).

On the issue of slavery and the status of African Americans in the nation, Sedgwick and Child sometimes appear as foils to one another. Certainly, Sedgwick did not share Child's radical abolitionism, but neither did she ignore slavery. She grapples with slavery within the borders of the nation in subplots in *Redwood* and *The Linwoods*: the former features the abuse of the slave Africk in early nineteenth-century Virginia, while the latter features Rose, a slave woman in late eighteenth-century New York on the eve of the Revolution,

whom the white heroine emancipates when she speaks powerfully of her longing for liberty. Sedgwick's thinking on race and slavery became increasingly conservative in the 1830s, and, arguably, despite Rose's stirring speech, Sedgwick takes a conservative position on the African American capacity for citizenship in *The Linwoods*.⁵ In the 1820s and '30s, however, Sedgwick also engaged slavery outside the boundaries of the American nation through key subplots set in European colonial sites in the West Indies. In *Redwood*, Caroline Redwood brings a female slave with her from Virginia to New England, and the slave, Lilly, escapes with her lover, the slave of a "West India planter" also traveling in New England (2: 270). Caroline ultimately marries a Captain in the British Royal Navy and moves with him to an unnamed island in the West Indies. Reformed by the time she marries, her death from the West Indies climate and childbearing nevertheless is a punishment for her earlier transgressions. In *Hope Leslie*, Indian heroine Magawisca protests against the survivors of the colonists' massacre of her tribe being sent as slaves to "the Islands of the Sun, to bend their free limbs to bondage like your beasts of burden" (which was, indeed, the fate to which the Puritans consigned the wives and children of Pequot leaders) (55). The novel's villain, Sir Philip Gardiner, has a history of West Indian piracy and plans to escape there if his plot to abduct Hope Leslie, the English heroine, fails (334).

These novels reference the source of the wealth of the West Indies – plantations worked by slaves – only obliquely, but the brutality of white plantation owners in the region erupts unexpectedly into one of Sedgwick's children's stories, "Dogs" (1828). Discussing the sagacity of dogs with their mother, the child protagonists learn how the French planters in St. Domingo (later Haiti) deployed dogs to put down slave rebellion. Using dogs to pursue murderers or robbers, the mother explains, "might be excused . . . but no apology can be made for the French of St. Domingo," who used them to "pursue and devour" slaves who "carried on a war against their masters" because they were "determined to be free" (36). In a culmination of these themes, Sedgwick introduces a fully developed West Indian backstory for the American heroine's British grandfather in *Clarence* – a second son of an aristocrat, he goes to Jamaica to make his own fortune as a plantation owner and, after losing his British wife and son, takes a free woman of color, Eli Clairon, as a quasi wife, with tragic results for both Eli and the son she bears him.⁶ Although in her fiction of the 1820s and '30s Sedgwick often displaced the controversy over slavery onto regions outside the nation, she also insistently represented cultural and economic ties between the USA and the Caribbean, making visible US complicity in slave enterprise there.

Sedgwick also grappled nearly obsessively in her fiction with political and military conflicts of the American Revolution and the early republic, most often intertwining historical events with tales of families split and star-crossed lovers kept apart by these conflicts. "Romance in Real Life," for example, presents an account of incidents in the life of Marie Angely, ostensibly an actual daughter of Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur, author of *Letters from an American Farmer* (1782). The precise details of what happened to Crèvecoeur's children when he left his Hudson Valley farm during the American Revolution and how he recovered them on his return from Europe in 1783 remain a mystery, but in a tale presented as derived from fact, Sedgwick accounts for several years Marie lived as "Mary Reynolds" on a Massachusetts farm on the other side of the Hudson River. Sedgwick's tale then jumps forward a decade to involve Marie in an elaborate transnational marriage plot. In "The Country Cousin," Yankee farmer Amos Blunt refuses to allow his daughter Anna to marry a British officer in the occupying army. His refusal leads to a clandestine marriage, the birth and eventual death of a blind son, and a host of tragedies, but ultimately families and nations are reconciled. In "A Story of Shay's War," the romantic conflict, like the historical tax revolt, is internal to the new nation: two young men with opposing political sympathies compete for the affection of one young woman. The story ends on the battlefield, combining heroic acts of friendship, romantic union, and death in rapid succession: Harry Lee, on the side of the insurgents, sacrifices his life to save his friend, militia-member Francis Graham, and with his dying breath conveys heroine Lora's hand to Graham. In the context of Sedgwick's full career, her novel-length treatment in *The Linwoods* of families and lovers divided by military and political conflict is a culmination rather than a departure.

Sedgwick's portrayals of Native Americans, slavery, and the Revolution barely begin to exhaust her thematic range from 1822 to 1835. For example, Sedgwick also repeatedly focuses on the status of women in the culture and the choice of marriage *versus* the single state for women, often intertwining these questions with other themes.⁷ Her range in terms of audience is varied, but more easily mapped. Sedgwick published a significant number of works specifically designated for young audiences during this period. Her tales and sketches published in the *Juvenile Miscellany* and the *Youth's Keepsake* are explicitly marked as "children's literature" by their periodical contexts, while she and/or her publisher designated the *Travellers* as for children through its subtitle, *A Tale Designed for Young People*. Sedgwick did not, however, always distinguish between child and adult audiences. Reading against their original audience address, she anthologized two tales published in *The Youth's Keepsake*,

"The Elder Sister" (retitled "The Eldest Sister") and "The Canary Family," in *Tales & Sketches*, alongside tales originally published in gift books for adults. All of her "adult" novels of this period feature young female heroines – Jane Elton of *A New-England Tale*, Ellen Bruce of *Redwood*, the title character of *Hope Leslie*, Gertrude Clarence of *Clarence*, Isabella Linwood of *The Linwoods* – and these heroines make Sedgwick a founding figure of the genre of "woman's fiction." Notably, all of these heroines are adolescents, as are the majority of female protagonists in her gift book tales and sketches. In the concluding chapter of *Hope Leslie*, she directly addresses this intermediate class of readers, no longer children and not yet fully adults, "that large, and most indulgent class of our readers, the misses in their teens" (369).

An adult Sedgwick addresses young women of her own socioeconomic class in *Hope Leslie* (well educated and in comfortable financial circumstances), but her address in *Home* is explicitly cross-class. Identified on the title-page as "the author of 'Redwood' 'Hope Leslie,' &c." (that is, as the author of novels), Sedgwick dedicated *Home* to her target audience: "To farmers and mechanics this little volume is respectfully inscribed by their friend, the author" (n.p.). While this dedication makes a cross-class address explicit, it was implicit as far back as the beginning of her career in *Mary Hollis*, a tale in simple language about an exemplary working-class woman, designed for inexpensive or free distribution as a tract.

Indeed, Sedgwick's language and narrative strategies vary widely with audience, subject matter, and purpose – there is no one "Sedgwick voice." She is most often an "engaging narrator," to use Robyn Warhol's term, speaking in the first person, directly addressing readers, and guiding their gaze and their interpretation. For instance, in the beginning of a chapter in *Home*, the narrator explains, "As we have entered Mr. Barclay's dining-room, we are tempted to linger there, and permit our readers to observe the details of the dinner. The right ministration of the table is an important item in *home* education" (27). However, her use of the plural first person ("we") in some works and the singular first person ("I") in others produces distinctly different effects. As Susan Harris observes, the "we" narrator in *A New-England Tale* "assumes more authority" than Susanna Rowson's "I" narrator in *Charlotte Temple* (1791), because while Rowson's "I" is a "discrete individual," Sedgwick's "we" is a "representative voice suggest[ing] a diffused personality that speaks for the authority" of a broader culture (*19th-Century American Women's Novels*, 52).

Sedgwick consistently narrates as "we" in her novels, but she frequently narrates as "I" in her short fiction. In the "Elder Sister," for example, the

first-person narrator presents herself as a friend and observer of the characters whose lives are the main focus of the story. In contrast, in "A Reminiscence of Federalism" the narrating "I" is an adult recalling events she participated in and witnessed as a child ("I was sent when a very young child . . . to pass the summer in a clergyman's family in Vermont" [107]). Narrating as "I" in "A Reminiscence" and other stories, Sedgwick delicately walks the blurry line between fact and fiction. Her parents did actually send her to spend a summer in Burlington, Vermont, as a girl, and she drew on her memories in "A Reminiscence"; however, the romance at the tale's center is clearly a carefully crafted fiction cum political allegory.⁸ Narrating as "I," Sedgwick invites readers to engage her tales and sketches as representations of reality, but in tales such as "The Country Cousin" she also playfully draws attention to such narrative maneuvers as conventions of the craft of fiction. She first narrates the frame tale as "we," but then shifts to "I" in a sentence that both claims reality and pokes fun at the distinction as literary convention. "Somewhere between twenty and thirty years ago," she writes, "we – or rather I – for . . . we detest that reviewer in the abstract, the 'cold, and critical,' and pompous we – I was on a visit to a friend of my parents who resided in New York" (156).

In other gift book tales, Sedgwick is similarly playful in her narratorial comments on this publication context and its conventions. The opening of "Mary Dyre" prods readers to prepare them for a dark and serious tale about religious persecution, warning that "a Quaker Martyr, may appear to the fair holiday readers of souvenirs, a very unfit personage to be introduced into the romantic and glorious company of lords, and ladye lovers; of doomed brides; and all-achieving heroines; chivalric soldiers; suffering outlaws; and Ossianic sons of the forest" (294). "Cacoethes Scribendi," published five years into the gift book fad in the United States, is, among other things, an elaborate spoof of its own publication context. The density and range of allusion in "Cacoethes" (she references the works of authors from Juvenal to Milton to Pope to Shakespeare to Thomas Gray and more) highlight Sedgwick's own high level of learning and accomplishment (a level clearly higher than that of protagonist Mrs. Courland, whose pretensions to authorship the narrator gently mocks) and makes great demands on readers. Her other gift book tales and her novels can be similarly allusive, and in *Clarence* and *The Linwoods*, by quoting from works in multiple languages without providing translations, she positions herself as a woman of the world and a cosmopolitan novelist.⁹

Such sophistication would subvert her aims in works addressed to children, in which she narrates in the guise of a sympathetic teacher speaking in simple

language. "I will not write out the moral of my story," the narrator of "Dogs" explains, because she remembers how much she "hated those formal morals to Æsop's fables" that "almost crushed the life out of" the stories. Nevertheless, she derives a moral from the actions of the child protagonist Mary, who "always set the qualities of the heart above the faculties of the mind—goodness above genius" (3). In *Mary Hollis*, her aim is to instruct adults possessing only basic literacy skills, so as narrator she assumes the guise of a benevolent lady counseling lower-class aspirants to self-improvement. Responding to the notion that Mary's full recovery from destitution after her husband's death from alcoholism was merely lucky, the narrator carefully explains that "Mary's *luck*" was not produced by "magic" or witchcraft but by her return "to her old trade" of tailoring. Mary herself "used to say," the narrator reports, "that her health and her time were her capital, and that it was her own fault, if the interest of such a stock did not support her" (21).

While the voices of Sedgwick's narrators predominate in these examples, as Charlene Avallone observes, Sedgwick "develops the narrative and instructive ends of her fiction as much through conversations among characters as through narration or exposition" ("Catharine Sedgwick," 197). Dialogue is thus a key feature in all of her fiction. Indeed, the story "Old Maids" consists of nothing but dialogue between characters who address each other as "Mrs. Seton" and "Anne" – in the absence of narrative markers or interpolations, only their words addressed to one another identify them as an older married woman and a younger unmarried one. Although Sedgwick wrote no purely epistolary novels, characters' words conveyed in letters figure prominently in all of her novels and many of her stories. In *Hope Leslie* and *Clarence*, readers learn about the true character and disguised identities of the villains (Sir Philip Gardiner and Henrique Pedrillo, respectively) through their letters addressed to off-stage co-conspirators.

Especially in her short stories of the 1820s, Sedgwick added further layers of voice and language by constructing frame tales. The frame of "The Catholic Iroquois," which nestles a frame inside a frame, is particularly elaborate. The opening frame tale narrates the hardships of a "gentleman" traveling "from Niagara to Montreal" in the early 1800s, who is forced to take shelter in the hovel of a French Canadian family (72). In conversation with the gentleman, the father of the family relates the history of a mysterious manuscript in the family's possession: in 1700 "young Bonchard" discovered in a cave a manuscript composed by Père Mésnard (an actual Jesuit missionary priest of the mid-seventeenth century) and made the copy possessed by the father's illiterate family (79, 84). Only after the reader descends through these two

frames does she encounter the contents of the found manuscript, the story of the Iroquois sisters who give Sedgwick's tale its name.

This rich variety and continuity over fourteen years complicate claims about Sedgwick's seemingly abrupt retreat from being a "major novelist" to being a writer of advice literature. The publishing chronology the year in which this seeming shift occurred is illuminating. The book marking her supposed retreat, *Home*, actually appeared before *The Linwoods* and was entirely consistent with the tone and style of many of her earlier works. *Home* and the two works that followed soon after it in a similar vein, *The Poor Rich Man*, and *the Rich Poor Man* (1836) and *Live and Let Live; or, Domestic Service Illustrated* (1837), are most often characterized as "didactic novellas" rather than "novels," and Sedgwick herself did not call them novels. Nevertheless, in all three she uses the same tools from the craft of fiction she used in her earlier longer fictions, such as character dialogue, an engaging narrator, and the manipulation of time in plotting the trajectories of multiple characters over extended periods of time.

Sedgwick wrote no fictional works as long as *The Linwoods* in the twenty years after 1835, but the quantity of her fictional output remained remarkably constant through the 1840s. As the gift books declined in prestige and popularity, she increasingly published short fiction in magazines, migrating as a marquee contributor from venue to venue (from *Godey's*, to *Graham's*, to the *Columbian*, and finally *Sartain's*). "Wilton Harvey," a tale of financial intrigue and murder during the financial panic of 1837 centering around the male protagonist named in the title, appeared serially in six installments in *Godey's* in 1842. Its length warranted separate book publication, but instead Sedgwick collected it in her *Tales and Sketches, Second Series* (1844). Interestingly, in the 1840s the founding figure of "woman's fiction" wrote two book-length fictions centering on the lives of male characters. Approximately the same length as "Wilton Harvey," *The Boy of Mount Rhigi* (1848) focuses on two young male protagonists who grow into manhood; in her Preface, Sedgwick directs the book to the attention of "our young people, who have been carefully nurtured" to "awaken" in them "their duty to those who are less favored" ([5]).

After *The Linwoods*, Sedgwick nearly abandoned seventeenth- and eighteenth-century American subject matter, but not historical fiction as a genre, writing several long tales set in early Europe, such as "The White Scarf" (1838), set in 1409 during the reign of Charles VI; "A Huguenot Family" (1842), depicting the persecution of French Protestants in the seventeenth century; and "Imelda of Bologna" (1846), set in thirteenth-century Italy.

Sedgwick also increasingly branched out into non-fiction prose forms. With *Letters from Abroad to Kindred at Home* (1841), she entered the popular field of travel literature, and her prose published in magazines sometimes took the form of non-fiction sketches or essays about contemporary society, particularly in New York. However, the literary craft acquired over two decades of writing fiction was equally important to her non-fiction prose – the “letters” in *Letters from Abroad* are no more unrevised documents of her 1839–40 travels in Europe than “A Reminiscence of Federalism” is a transparent account of her childhood summer in Vermont. Even in her two books that might most accurately be characterized as “conduct books” or “advice literature,” *Means and Ends, or Self-Training* (1839) and *Morals of Manners; or, Hints for Our Young People* (1846), Sedgwick deploys the techniques of fiction, with dialogue and brief tales emerging in the midst of expository prose. Indeed, these books qualify as a reversion to what Sarah Emily Newton calls “conduct fiction,” an intermediate form between the conduct book and the early American novel. Using Rowson’s *Mentoria* (1791) and Hannah Webster Foster’s *The Boarding School* (1798) as examples, Newton argues that “the use of anecdote or tale to illustrate . . . conduct topics” in these “semifictional texts bridge[s] the sermonizing didacticism of the conduct book and the dramatic structure of the early novel” (“Wise and Foolish Virgins,” 149). Deploying this earlier genre decades later, Sedgwick bridges seemingly distinct genres in her own body of work, her later “conduct books” and her earlier “major novels.”

In *The Shape of Hawthorne’s Career*, Baym never defines “career,” taking its meaning to be self-evident. However, some of her remarks in *Woman’s Fiction* might seem to exclude antebellum women novelists if pretensions to artistic seriousness are taken as a prerequisite for having a literary career. “[T]hey saw themselves not as ‘artists,’” she writes, “but as professional writers with work to do and a living to be made from satisfactory fulfillment of an obligation to their audience” (16). In a new introduction for a 1993 reprint of *Woman’s Fiction*, Baym stands by her assessment that she found no American equivalents to George Eliot, that the women were not understood as particularly “literary” or as “major” in their own days and are best thought of as “professionals making a product desired by their clients rather than artists making an object expressing their own genius and talent,” although she does add the qualification that professionalism entails the “possession of expertise” (xvi). But should writing to entertain and instruct an audience necessarily disqualify a writer from artistic seriousness? More recently, Angela Vietto has argued for the usefulness of “the concept of the literary career” for women writers of the

Revolutionary era. Defining career broadly as a “path” provides a tool, Vietto claims, that allows us “to examine 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” (*Women and Authorship in Revolutionary America*, 91). Unlike Baym, Vietto divorces the concept of career from publication and commercial success, arguing for the application of the concept to authors whose works circulated only in manuscript.

Sedgwick's sense of authorial vocation, however, was defined from the start in relation to publication and broader audiences. As her literary career was drawing to a close, both Sedgwick and reviewers increasingly traced just such a long path. In the late 1840s, Sedgwick and publisher George Palmer Putnam planned a collected edition of her works. A truly complete collected edition never appeared – Putnam's repeated business failures and the lack of cooperation from Harper & Brothers, the publisher of many of her works of the 1830s and '40s, made it impossible (Homestead, “Introduction”). Nevertheless, it is clear that Sedgwick intended the edition to be comprehensive, encompassing both the novels of the first half of her career and the shorter didactic works of the second. As she explains in the preface to her revised 1849 edition of *Clarence*, “The selection of Clarence as the first in the series of republication has been accidental,” and she also planned to republish “the smaller works, written for the largest classes of readers and for children” (xi). Although by the late 1840s she had not written a novel proper in more than a decade, she eagerly embraced the opportunity to revise *A New-England Tale*, *Redwood*, and *Clarence*, making substantive changes to all three. This self-reflexive labor may have inspired her to undertake at an advanced age the onerous task of novel-writing – her longest novel, *Married or Single?* (1857), appeared when she was in her late sixties.

Sarah Robbins argues that properly reading Sedgwick's didactic fictions of the 1830s and '40s in relation to her earlier fiction requires a willingness to recognize “the nineteenth-century overlap in literary categories usually dichotomized today,” including “children–adult, straightforward–complex, didactic–aesthetic” (“Periodizing Authorship,” 5). Critics in the 1850s easily located such “overlaps” as they looked back over three decades or more of Sedgwick's career, seeing the contour or “shape” of her career, with *Married or Single?* as a logical culmination. “Miss Sedgwick's long literary career,” opined *The Merchants' Magazine*, “has been genuinely, and in the best sense, American.” The reviewer recognizes a distinction between “[h]er novels [which] have reflected the various, and often incongruous, aspects of our American life and social relations” and “her didactic works [which] have taught

the duties growing out of them, the true spirit of Christian Democracy.” However, he immediately collapses the distinction, judging *Married or Single?* “worthy of a place in the long list of her admirable works.” A reviewer in *The Christian Inquirer* (a Unitarian weekly) goes further, unproblematically conjoining Sedgwick’s desire to engage an audience with a desire for artistic expression, and the role of moral instructor with the role of literary “genius.” “Driven to authorship by a passionate love of sympathy and an irresistible proclivity for expression,” the critic writes, “she has continued in it from an ever-growing love of usefulness, and a consciousness of power to assist in the cultivation of the domestic and social life of our young nation” (“Miss Sedgwick”). Sedgwick was first “a charming novelist” who gained an “eager and hungry” audience, the critic writes, but then she “dedicated” her “powers” “to the improvement, correction, and formation of our national manners.” Having drawn this distinction between the “charming novelist” and the moral instructor, the critic immediately dissolves it by mapping a crossing in the opposite direction, describing how in her novels Sedgwick “ingeniously disguised the teacher in the novelist” and “kept . . . serious ends under . . . gay appearances.” “[T]hroughout her whole literary career,” the critic concludes, Sedgwick “has won [readers] to gentleness, truth, honor, purity, and piety” by using “her genius” to arouse emotion by bringing “before their minds the living characters . . . of her genial stories.”

The careers of other women who also began writing fiction in the antebellum era but a decade or more after Sedgwick deserve similar attention. Both Harriet Beecher Stowe and E. D. E. N. Southworth, for instance, had careers fully as long and various as Sedgwick’s. Stowe published short stories in magazines and gifts books for nearly fifteen years before writing *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, her first novel, and yet literary historians seldom pay attention to her earliest fiction as a context for reading her bestselling novel; nor have her novels and stories after *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, and especially her fiction of the 1860s and ’70s, received adequate attention.¹⁰ E. D. E. N. Southworth published fiction regularly from the late 1840s through the late 1880s, and yet twenty-first-century readers know her primarily as the author of a single novel, *The Hidden Hand* (serial publication 1859, book publication 1888). Arguably, Sedgwick’s fiction and Sedgwick herself as a model for long-term dedication to the craft of fiction influenced both Stowe and Southworth, and yet their careers assumed their own distinctive shapes. Their bodies of work – and the bodies of work of many other women who began writing before the Civil War – await the attention of twenty-first-century literary historians willing to read attentively for the human sensibilities and dedication to craft they represent.

Notes

1. On primarily postbellum nineteenth-century women as aspiring to serious artistry in ways that antebellum women (ostensibly) did not, see Boyd, *Writing for Immortality*. Placing the emergence of the "serious" woman artist even later, see Ammons, *Conflicting Stories*.
2. See Rust, *Prodigal Daughters*; Karcher, *The First Woman in the Republic*; and Teed, "A Passion for Distinction," respectively, for each woman's career.
3. Full bibliographical details provided only for quoted works. Consult Damon-Bach, Homestead, and Roepsch, "Chronological Bibliography," for complete information. Smyers and Winship, "Catharine Maria Sedgwick," provides advertisement and review information that establishes chronology of publication within years for book publication.
4. Ryan, for example, in a broad-ranging analysis of Child's Indian fiction and relying on Karcher, characterizes Child as "writ[ing] Indian stories throughout her career," while she claims that Sedgwick "turned her attention to other matters" after *Hope Leslie* ("Republican Mothers and Indian Wives," 34).
5. Both Avallone ("Catharine Sedgwick's White Nation-Making") and Weierman ("A Slave Story I Began and Abandoned") trace Sedgwick's increasing conservatism on race and slavery during these years.
6. For a full analysis, see Homestead, "Introduction."
7. See Lubovich, "'Married or Single?'," and Foletta, "'The dearest sacrifice,'" for career-spanning analyses of this theme in Sedgwick, although both miss the opportunity to analyze many short stories and her didactic novellas.
8. For her later-life account of her childhood experiences in Bennington, which notably includes no romance, see Kelley, *Power*, 79–82.
9. See Gould, "Catharine Sedgwick's Cosmopolitan Nation," on the cosmopolitanism of *The Linwoods*, focusing on Sedgwick's engagement with French language and culture. *Clarence's* range of linguistic and cultural engagements beyond the borders of the American nation is even broader.
10. See Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe*, for this long trajectory – although, alas, even a Pulitzer Prize-winning biography of Stowe was not enough to make most literary historians look beyond Stowe's most famous novel.

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