

ened their political consciousness, and the Revolution moved them to action. “Daughters of Liberty,” as Hannah Griffitts hailed them, they answered her call to boycott British goods and turned instead to homespun production. The Revolution itself and the political divides within their own social rank threatened the entire project of elite consolidation. Like their male counterparts, women of means took positions that ranged across the spectrum from patriot to loyalist. However, as *Fatherly* shows, the rising power of the middling and lower sorts trumped sharply edged partisanship.

Acting together in the 1770s, elite women continued to pursue two markers of exclusivity—sociability and advanced education. In the next two decades, they successfully revived the social and cultural practices that had set them apart. *Fatherly*’s telling conclusion reminds us that as much as these women labored on behalf of elite status, they also “reaped the benefits of being gentlewomen and learned ladies in a society that was profoundly predicated on social inequality” (184).

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MARY KELLEY

Prodigal Daughters: Susanna Rowson’s Early American Women. By MARION RUST. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008. 328 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$24.95.)

Novelist, playwright, actress, poet, author of textbooks, and proprietress of a well-regarded female academy, Susannah Haswell Rowson was quite the public figure in postrevolutionary America. In this world that lauded public men but equated public women with prostitutes, she and other like-minded women carefully scripted their public personas to maintain their respectability. Many of them contributed to public life without directly challenging the fundamental tenets of a republican order that denied them most basic civil, political, and economic rights.

Rowson is known today mainly as the author of *Charlotte Temple* (1791), the hugely popular tale of an innocent young woman who was seduced and impregnated by a seemingly honorable man, only to be abandoned to die penniless, disgraced, and alone. In *Prodigal Daughters*, Marion Rust argues persuasively that Rowson’s most famous creation is not representative of her larger body of work and that Charlotte, the passive victim, was atypical among her female protagonists. Rust encourages readers “to attend to the activist dimensions of early American gender practice via a thorough investigation of Rowson’s multifaceted narrative and wide-ranging life experience” (23). She contends that “Rowson’s project was to qualify white middle-class women for the influence and tolerance accorded to those whose own corporeal profile—also white, but male, and with a

grasp on its own parcel of earth and/or goods—was seen to free them from bias altogether and hence entitle them to true self-governance at both the individual and national level” (29).

These issues are important, but—as the above quotations show—Rust’s needlessly complicated writing can be seriously off-putting. Her lengthy analyses of Rowson’s novels, plays, and poems are often tough going, but they are nonetheless valuable for their thoroughness and their attention to lesser-known works. Rust’s discussion of these texts, however, focuses almost entirely on authorial intent rather than audience reception, aside from a detailed assessment of the views of some famous male commentators—including Rowson’s champion Mathew Carey and her chief critic William Cobbett, neither of whom recognized her as the consummate professional she clearly was.

In five chapters, Rust traces the evolution of Rowson’s public statements and stature through her published work, interweaving themes of feminine sacrifice, independence, and sexuality. Careful readers will discern several key points, the most important of which involves the seemingly dramatic contrast between Rowson’s early warning against female passivity and lack of agency in her first novel, *Charlotte Temple*, and her far more assertive prescription that women be educated for independence and self-governance in *Lucy Temple* (1828), her last book; *Lucy Temple* tells the story of Charlotte’s daughter, who lived chastely, self-sufficiently, respectably, and happily as a teacher and mentor to young women.

This evolution, Rust suggests, makes Rowson a consequential literary figure whose work connected eighteenth-century ideals of genteel womanhood to notions of virtuous femininity that animated women’s benevolence and reform movements by the antebellum era. *Prodigal Daughters* certainly demonstrates Rowson’s significance. Her life and work, however, still await a monograph that is as accessible and engaging as its extraordinary subject.

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Men of Letters in the Early Republic: Cultivating Forums of Citizenship. By CATHERINE O’DONNELL KAPLAN. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008. 256 pp. Illustrations, notes, index. \$24.95.)

In the last decade, historians have begun revising our understanding of Federalists. Whereas Jefferson’s opponents have often been depicted as out-of-touch cranks incapable of adapting to postrevolutionary society, now they appear in the literature as clever innovators who were intentionally engaged in the civic process. Catherine O’Donnell Kaplan contributes to this historiographical development with a sparkling account of various “men of letters.”