Hannah Webster Foster's seduction novel, *The Coquette* (1797), concludes with the heroine's admission to try "what a recluse and solitary mode of life will produce"(213). The stylization of Foster's protagonist, Eliza Wharton, as an anchoress withdrawn from the social world is further reinforced by the text's repeated references to her rejection of food, her gruesome emaciation, and her consumptive decline in a Danvers Tavern. Such characterizations are not however relegated to Eliza's final days. As early as her third letter to her friend Lucy, Eliza considers the relationship between virtue and reclusion in her discussion of the domestic confinement attending a union with the text's stalwart minister, Mr. Boyer. "You are not so morose," she asks Lucy, "as to wish me to become a nun, would our country, and religion allow it"(109)? In a subsequent conversation with Mrs. Richman on the prospect of marriage as a curtailment of her newly-found social freedom, Eliza explains how she "despise[s] those contracted ideas which confine virtue to a cell. I have no notion of becoming a recluse"(114). Readers are left, however, with the obvious irony (not lost on her friend, Julia Granby) that Eliza becomes "what she once dreaded above all things, a recluse!"(193). Consistently deploying tropes of voluntary confinement, wilful self-mortification, and hermitic withdrawal, Foster's *The Coquette* interrogates contemporary depictions of the feme sole by self-consciously yoking the ontological concerns of the coquette and those of the female hermit.

This paper begins by considering a small but important archive of American female hermit tales written in the final decades of the eighteenth century to highlight the extent to which Foster's representation of Wharton is indebted to an existing narrative tradition that constellates coquetry, seduction, and hermitic reclusion. By the 1790s, this narrative tradition was well-established enough for Rowson to sardonically indict the motif in her "Sketch of a Modern Novel"(1793). Appearing in *The Inquisitor: or, Invisible Rambler*, Rowson insists that the American sentimental novel invariably concludes with a duel, "and, if convenient, a suicide might not be amiss," and a series of "wonderful trials" for your heroine to suffer, the sentimental heroine must display "the fortitude of an anchorite" and the "patience of an angel"(153). Rowson's comments are representative, not only of the post-revolutionary American seduction novel, but also of the female hermit's formulaic backstory. Invariably involving the hermit's self-delusion or betrayal by the false pleasures of a frothy and frivolous urban society, pleasures including unchecked social climbing, an unhealthy adherence to
social status, and a capacious desire for sexual conquest, the hermit's backstory routinely depicts the male hermit as an erstwhile libertine, rake, or bigamist. In its female form, the hermit is most often an erstwhile coquette or, in the very least, an imprudent maiden who, refusing the council of parents and friends, ends up in a dangerous game of seduction with a predatory libertine. Popularized by American republications of European seduction narratives such as Eliza Haywood's *The British Recluse* (1722), Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa* (1748), and the Marquise de Lambert's *The Fair Solitary; or, the Female Hermit* (1747, 1790), post-revolutionary American female hermit tales such as Abraham Panther's "A Surprising account of the Discovery of a Lady who was taken by the Indians in the year 1777, and after making her escape, she retired to a lonely Cave, where she lived nine years" (1787), "The Hermitess; Or, Fair Secluder" (1790), Susannah Rowson's "Annie's Story" and "The Retribution" (1793), *Amelia; or, The Faithless Briton* (1798), and the parallel texts of *A Faithful Narrative of Elizabeth Wilson...* (1807) and *The Pennsylvania hermit. A narrative of the extraordinary life of Amos Wilson* (1822), make explicit the connection between seduction/attempted rape and hermitic withdrawal from society.

This paper builds upon previous research on the political significance of the American hermit, where I argue that the hermit's reclusion inheres in his willingness to defer taking sides, to scrutinize the cultural relevance of voluntary reclusion for a specifically female post-revolutionary subjectivity. A consideration of late eighteenth-century American discourses of coquetry, contemporary accounts of female hermits, and Lockean epistemology reveals the coquette's apparent superficiality and wavering commitments mirroring the Lockean conception of liberty-as-suspended-judgment informing hermitic withdrawal. The paper concludes with a detailed discussion of Foster's *The Coquette*, a text that forcefully announces the relevance of female hermitage for the post-revolutionary American coquette. The strange framing of Foster's seduction narrative with references to hermitic reclusion suggests that Eliza's withdrawal from society represents only the most literal example of an epistemology grounded in studied deliberation and deferred judgment. Marshalling the hermit's characteristic abstraction and deliberation to negotiate the fraught economy of the marriage market, the feme sole insists that the coquette's stereotypical equivocations must be understood as an ascetic practice of postponing present gratification for future reward, a postponement that applies the studied and deferred deliberation of the American male hermit to the politics of courtship.
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