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**The Life and Prose Works of Amelia Opie (1769-1853)**

by

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Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

to the Department of Literature,  
Faculty of Arts  
Open University

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In Two Volumes

**Volume One: the Thesis**



Abstract:  
'Life and Prose Works of Amelia Opie (1769-1853)'

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This thesis examines the life and prose works of Amelia Opie. It explores the moral and social ideology of the novels and tales, setting them in the context of Opie's own ideological development as she moves from the radicalism of the 1790s, through a period of intellectual and religious uncertainty to her conversion to Quakerism in 1825. It draws on a detailed analysis of all Opie's extant writing in prose, including a comprehensive survey of her letters.

Biographical criticism has been rather unfashionable in recent years, though this is beginning to change. The argument put forward here is that only through detailed biographical case studies is it possible to understand the complex and shifting alignments and allegiances of the period 1790 to 1830. This has often been characterised as an era in which both society and literature were highly polarised, with a clear division between radicals and conservatives. Careful analysis of Opie's life and work reveals the difficulties involved in categorising her in either camp, and her case exemplifies the way in which this very limited, and limiting, perspective can misrepresent or oversimplify the position of individuals within this period. Opie's position was both complex at any given time, embodying elements of both radical and conservative thought, and developed and changed over time in response to public and private events. Attempts to see her as a radical, on the one hand, or conservative, on the other, are bound to distort the interpretation of her writings and the assessment of her wider significance as a writer.

This thesis therefore aims to provide a new insight into the work of Amelia Opie and also to represent the importance and value of a biographically sensitive criticism to a full understanding of both individual

writers and the periods in which they work. An appendix to the thesis provides an annotated register of approximately four hundred of her letters, giving details of their location.



## The Life and Prose Works of Amelia Opie (1769 – 1853)

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis on the life and prose writings of Amelia Opie (1769-1853) is the first full-length analysis of this writer since that of Margaret MacGregor, published in 1933.<sup>1</sup> Since that time, critical attitudes have changed, further research has taken place and some of Opie's works have been brought back into print in modern, scholarly editions. These factors make a re-assessment of Opie's work very timely. The present study is based on all her extant writings, including, for the first time, a comprehensive survey of some four hundred letters which have survived, as well as excerpts from her journal, now lost, but which have been recorded by previous biographers.

Opie's life may be seen to fall into five phases. The first was that of her childhood and youth, passed in her native city of Norwich, which saw the publication of her first tale, performance of at least one play and the production of some verse. This led to a second phase, that of political radicalism spanning the years 1794 to 1798, in both Norwich and London,

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<sup>1</sup> Margaret Eliot MacGregor, 'Amelia Alderson Opie, Worldling and Friend', *Smith College Studies in Modern Languages*, 14 (1933), 3-127.

when she contributed to the pro-revolutionary periodical *The Cabinet*, attended the Treason Trials, probably addressed a large political meeting and became part of a radical clique which also comprised William Godwin, Thomas Holcroft and Elizabeth Inchbald.<sup>2</sup> Following her marriage to the portraitist John Opie came a decade of life in fashionable London circles and this period saw her establishment as a writer of an extremely popular sentimental tale *Father and Daughter* (1801), two volumes of verse, and the novel *Adeline Mowbray* (1805), often perceived as a *roman à cléf* because of her close association with William Godwin. After the premature death of her husband, Opie returned to Norwich. This middle period saw the production of several shorter tales as she exploited the popularity of her earlier work. The final phase emphasised her pre-occupation with religious matters, and the year 1825, when she was admitted to the Society of Friends, forms a convenient watershed to separate these two later periods of her life.

This thesis follows a chronological structure based on these five phases, identifying and discussing the changes in her life and her writing as they occur. This biographical approach has been assisted by a scrutiny of all of Opie's extant letters, located in over forty archival sources, and brought together for the first time in an annotated register appended to the thesis. The letters not only form a counterpoint to her published works, but also modulate among themselves so that four distinct but overlapping

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<sup>2</sup> Tusculan Society, *The Cabinet*, 3 vols. (Norwich: J.March, 1795)

groups become discernable: the letters of political import, written to such people as Robert Southey, Sir James Mackintosh and Lord Brougham; those of religious matters, written to her Quaker friends such as Joseph John Gurney and Elizabeth Fry; those presenting the affairs of people of *ton*, addressed to such people as Lady Charleville and Lady Boileau; and those which seem to have been inspired by deep friendship or family connections, such as those to Susannah Taylor, William Hayley and her cousins Eliza Alderson and Henry Briggs.

Amelia Opie was adept at self-construction and the images of herself that she presents are sometimes contradictory. The plain Friend does not sit easily with the woman of worldly pleasures, nor the radical of the 1790s with the conservative moralist of her later years. These contradictions, sometimes startlingly revealed in her letters, refreshingly remind us of the complexity of human experience and the ideological plurality of any age. That critics have attempted to apply such reductive labels as 'radical' or 'conservative' in a rigid and all-excluding fashion to a writer whose work spanned such a range as Opie's is curious as well as clearly unhelpful. The knots in which some critics have managed to tie themselves in their examination of aspects of *Adeline Mowbray*, for example, surely indicate the impossibility of sustaining such an unwieldy critical apparatus. This thesis provides a lengthy review and analysis of *Adeline Mowbray* as a totality, pointing out the inadequacies of such blunt critical instruments in dealing with this complex novel, and the cul-de-sac



consequences of a too-easy identification of its protagonists with William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft.

Additionally, this view of Adeline Mowbray as a *roman à clé* fatally confuses the way in which this intriguing novel is read. No corroborative written evidence by Opie suggests such a reading, although the possibility of such an interpretation is there. If the novel is to be read in this way, then a more workable approach is suggested which, in my view, leads to more helpful and appropriate conclusions.

The thesis also provides the opportunity for full-length discussion of other works by Opie which are worthy of more critical interest than they presently enjoy. *Valentine's Eve* (1816), for example, sets up some intriguing tensions between artisan virtues and aristocratic corruption. Similarly, the discussion of Opie's first novel, *The Dangers of Coquetry* (1790) is the first critical essay to be written on this work. (Evidence in a letter enables this tale, published anonymously, to be firmly attributed to Opie.) Her most popular novel, *Father and Daughter* (1801) has recently been the subject of an interesting essay by Eleanor Ty.<sup>3</sup> This is welcome interest evidence of a renewed interest in a writer too often dismissed as simply 'grimly conservative'.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Eleanor Ty, *Empowering the Feminine* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), pp.133 – 144.

<sup>4</sup> Claudia Johnson, *Jane Austen, Women, Politics and the Novel* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p.121.

Opie's ability to reconstruct herself was not unique, and in some ways echoes the embarrassment of William Godwin when, in 1834 he looked back at some of his earlier remarks in *Political Justice*, first published in 1793.<sup>5</sup> The radicals of the 1790s – always in a minority – had had to realign their public personae following the failure of the French Revolution to bring about the universal *fraternité* for which they had hoped. In England this realignment was assisted, it seems, by the economic opportunities afforded by the Napoleonic wars, which enabled manufacturing and financial industries – occupations representing a large proportion of Dissenters – to develop to the extent that, in terms of the generation of wealth, they challenged the hegemony of the land-owning aristocracy.<sup>6</sup> This thesis demonstrates ways in which Opie reflected these societal and ideological changes in her writing from 1806 onward.

Opie's first biographer was her niece, Cecilia Brightwell, and Brightwell's construction of her subject echoes the stern public mores of the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup> Later biographies rely on Brightwell's sources and sometimes unquestioningly follow some of her constructions. For example, Brightwell makes no mention of Opie's involvement with *The Cabinet*, nor of her election speech, nor of some of her later work,

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<sup>5</sup> William Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. by F.E.L. Priestley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p.xvii.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, J. C. D. Clark, *English Society 1688-1832* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), p.72; Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: 1789-1848* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1962), p.40.

<sup>7</sup> Cecilia Brightwell, *Memorials of the Life of Amelia Opie* (Norwich: Fletcher and Alexander, 1854).

such as *Valentine's Eve* which caused her Quaker friends so much concern. Brightwell and later biographers, including MacGregor, had access to a manuscript archive known as the Carr Collection.

Unfortunately, and despite the best efforts to trace it of not only myself but others such as David Chandler, it seems clear that this archive has now disappeared.<sup>8</sup> We know that we have lost Opie's journal and the manuscript of her play *Adelaide* and probably other items also. In referring to these missing items, I have used Brightwell as a source, checking against MacGregor, whose approach was the more scholarly of the two. In the majority of cases where material is still extant, I have generally been able to cite the original document.

In addition to her prose writings, Opie published four volumes of verse.<sup>9</sup> She also wrote song lyrics for composers such as George Thomson (1757-1851) to set to music. A critical examination of her verse, originally intended to be a chapter of this thesis, has had to be excluded for reasons of length. However, in view of her close involvement with the abolition of slavery over several years, 'The Black Man's Lament' has been included, since there is no treatment of this important theme in her prose writing.

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<sup>8</sup> David Chandler, 'Norwich Literature 1788-1797: A Critical Survey' (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Oxford, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Amelia Opie, *Poems* (London: Longman, 1802); *The Warrior's Return and Other Poems* (London: Longman, 1808); *Lays for the Dead* (London: Longman, 1834); *The Black Man's Lament and Other Tales* (London: Harvey & Darton, 1825).

In order to be consistent, Amelia Opie is referred to throughout the thesis by her married name, which is that under which all her acknowledged works were published.



## CHAPTER 1

### Norwich and the First Writings

**A**melia Opie, born on 12 November 1769, was the only child of James Alderson (d.1825), a physician of Norwich, and his wife Amelia Briggs, who died in 1784. The location of her childhood years is significant. Norwich, a city of 40,000 population at that time, was a centre of radical thought and home to a large Dissenting population, of which Dr. Alderson and his daughter were very much part. C. B. Jewson notes that the city shared with London the distinction of being the only two cities in England to elect their governing corporations, pointing out that many other corporations were 'self-perpetuating oligarchies'. Although it had been overtaken by Bristol as the second city in the kingdom by 1788, Jewson emphasises that 'apart from London, Norwich was probably still the largest of those boroughs which were democratically governed.'<sup>1</sup>

Dr. Alderson was evidently a prominent figure in the city, with a very large practice. According to Hare, he 'prescribed for four or five hundred persons every week, and for the poor always free'.<sup>2</sup> At the time of Amelia's birth, he had a handsome residence in Calvert Street, opposite the mansion of the man who gave that street its name. Later

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<sup>1</sup> C. B. Jewson, *The Jacobin City: a Portrait of Norwich 1788-1802* (Glasgow and London: Blackie, 1975), Introduction, unpaginated.

<sup>2</sup> J. C. D. Hare, *The Gurneys of Earham*, 2 vols. (London: Geo. Allen, 1895), I, 95.

<sup>3</sup> Zachary Clark, *An Account of the Different Charities belonging to the Poor of the County of Norfolk* (Norwich: 1811), p.155.

he moved to 39 Colegate (since demolished), where he lived for the remainder of his life. Dr. Alderson is mentioned in Zachary Clark's contemporary *Account of the Different Charities belonging to the Poor of the County of Norfolk* (1811) as a trustee of the William Penning trust, which 'lent out and advanced, by portions of 25l. each, to 20 young tradesmen ... for the space of seven years, without interest'.<sup>3</sup>

Among the other trustees identified by Clark were 'John Taylor, of Surrey Street ... and John Gurney, Esq., of Earlham, near Norwich.'. Both the Taylors and the Gurneys were to be very influential in Amelia Alderson's life. Each family with its respective entourage represented two different strands of Dissent throughout the period of her life. The radical, atheistic Taylors were in favour of the democratic thrust of the American War of Independence, and hoped for a similar redress of power both in Britain and in France. Their form of Dissent was political in outlook, and it was this foregrounding of the political which was to fascinate Amelia Alderson in her youth, both in Norwich and in London. By contrast, the Quaker banking dynasty of the Gurneys represented a most conservative Dissent, whose values Amelia Opie was to adopt fully in later life.

The differences between these two groups, and the influences they were to have on Opie, may be glimpsed in two of her later letters. In 1801, she wrote to Susannah Taylor of a 'rot amongst royalty' and other matters of politics and radicalism in retreat.<sup>4</sup> Much later, in 1823, when Susannah Taylor was close to the end of her life, Opie, the

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<sup>4</sup> Opie to Susannah Taylor, 1801; Huntington Library, OP61.

convinced Quaker, wrote concernedly to Joseph John Gurney of her old confidante's apparent indifference to spiritual salvation, which lamentable lapse Opie condemns, distancing herself from her old confidante and representing her to Gurney as an atheistic reprobate.<sup>5</sup>

John Taylor, a yarn-maker, married Susannah Cook in 1777.

Walter Graham records how, in the 'old-fashioned parlour [with its] hospitable, unpretentious fireside' in St. George's, Colegate,

Mrs. Taylor became the fulcrum for a group of intellectual and literary figures making 'her home in this provincial city a centre of advanced social and political thought'.<sup>6</sup> She became the confidante to Amelia Alderson over a period of many years until her death in June 1823.

Much later, Henry Crabb Robinson was to write of 'the obviously unequalled attachment of Amelia Alderson to Mrs John Taylor'.<sup>7</sup>

Other visitors to Susannah Taylor's hearth included Sir James Mackintosh, Crabb Robinson, Robert Southey, William Enfield and Anna Laetitia Barbauld. Mrs Taylor was known familiarly as 'Madame Roland', a reference to the French revolutionary Manon Roland de la Platière, executed in 1793. Ross points to the physical resemblance as explanation of this, but the political implication cannot

<sup>5</sup> Opie to J J Gurney, 11 February 1823, Society of Friends' Library, London, Gurney 1.

<sup>6</sup> Walter Graham, 'The Authorship of the Norwich *Cabinet*, 1794-5', *Notes and Queries*, 162 (1932), p.294.

<sup>7</sup> Opie to Sarah Taylor, 4 November 1845, in Janet Ross *Three Generations of English Women* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893), p.241.

be ignored.<sup>8</sup> Sir James Mackintosh wrote to her of the salutary effect of her company: ‘I ought to be made permanently better by contemplating a mind like yours ... Your active kindness is a constant source of cheerfulness.’<sup>9</sup>

The Gurney brothers John and Henry founded the Norfolk and Norwich Bank in 1775 and enjoyed the patronage of many Norfolk Quakers. A notice in the *Norwich Mercury* of 6 May 1775 announced its opening for business, under the management of Simon Martin, a Friend from London.<sup>10</sup> There were two strands of the Gurney family in the Norwich area: the Gurneys of Keswick and the household of John Gurney (d.1779) of Magdalen Street. John Gurney was a strict Quaker, as was his wife Catherine Bell of Tottenham. As their family grew and the bank prospered, they moved to Earlham Hall, on the southern outskirts of the city. Of their eleven children, Elizabeth Fry (1780 – 1847) was to become known for her work with women prisoners, whereas Priscilla (1785 – 1821) achieved renown as a preacher. However, it was the tenth child, Joseph John Gurney (1788 – 1847) with whom Amelia Opie’s life was to become most intertwined.

Joseph John Gurney became an important figure in the development of Quakerism, particularly in the United States, where a sect called after him, predicated on the need for atonement, became

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Hare, p.22.

<sup>10</sup> W. H. Bidwell, *Annals of an East Anglian Bank* (Norwich: Goose, 1900), p.10.



established following his visits there. Braithwaite records a comment by Gurney which nicely summarises what for him was clearly a schism between the Dissenting factions in Norwich at the time, and serves to emphasise his own self-righteousness:

Norwich was remarkable as the residence of certain talented unbelievers who united decided democracy in politics with very low sentiments on the subject of religion.<sup>11</sup>

Gurney's ethical stance was strongly against the pleasures of the world – a stance which may be more readily adopted when one is comfortably off, perhaps – and his later writing to Opie was often to criticise her for her too-eager embrace of such pleasures, or to remind her of the perils that underlay them. On 14 June 1814, he wrote to her:

I refer to the fashionable world, of which I am apt to entertain two notions: the first is that there is much in it of *real evil*: the second that there is much also in it which has a tendency to produce forgetfulness of God and thus generate evil indirectly.<sup>12</sup>

These two families, John Taylor the artisan and his radical wife at their 'unpretentious fireside' and the religious Gurneys living in affluent frugality in their hall at Earlham, may be seen to symbolise not only the two strands of Dissent in Norwich at the time, but also the principal tensions that were to become evident in the life and writing of Amelia Opie herself.

The city was a noted stronghold of political and religious Dissent, and indeed was referred to scathingly by the Attorney-General

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<sup>11</sup> J. B. Braithwaite *Memoirs of John Joseph Gurney* (Norwich: Fletcher and Alexander, 1854), p.11.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p.236.

in 1794 as ‘the Jacobin city’.<sup>13</sup> The growth in religious Dissent may be seen by examining two city maps of the period. In 1766, Samuel King’s map of Norwich showed four Dissenting places of worship: the Quaker Meeting on Goat Lane, the Presbyterian Meeting (New Chapel) on Colegate, the Independent Meeting nearby and the Anabaptists on Southergate Street. By the time of Dallinger’s map of 1830, no less than eleven buildings described as chapels or meeting-houses are marked, together with four ‘Romanist’ chapels and a French Protestant (Huguenot) church.

The Aldersons were Unitarians and attended the Unitarian chapel known as the Octagon, the most famous of the Norwich meeting houses. Unitarians were anti-Trinitarian, as were several other Dissenting sects, treating God as a singular figure and Jesus Christ as his son. The Octagon still stands on Colegate, serving the purpose for which it was first erected. Designed by the local architect Thomas Ivory, who also designed the Theatre Royal and the Assembly Rooms, and built in 1756, the Octagon is evidence not only of the well-established presence of Dissent in Norwich, but, as will be seen from the slightly sardonic entry in John Wesley’s diaries recording his visit, of the affluent middle-class composition of the Dissenters, manifesting itself in the building’s expensive furnishings:

I was shown Dr. Taylor’s new meeting house, perhaps the most elegant in Europe ... The inside is finished in the highest taste and is as clean as any nobleman’s saloon. The communion table is of fine mahogany; the very latches of the pew doors are

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<sup>13</sup> Jewson, p.80.

polished brass. How can it be that the old coarse gospel should find admission here.<sup>14</sup>

The minister at the Octagon from 1785 to 1797 was William Enfield, who later commented on the prevailing intellectual atmosphere in the city: ‘There is no place in England where a man of letters may pass his days more happily than in Norwich!’<sup>15</sup>

There was indeed a number of writers and scholars in the city at the time, some of whom were women from Dissenting families.

Sectarian distinctions were especially important in terms of attitudes to the education of women. In contrast to the views of the supporters of the established Church, Dissenting sects such as the Unitarians valued women as equal to men in terms of intellectual ability. Such women had often received a better education than the women from Anglican families, sometimes studying subjects such as science and Greek, which the more conservative Anglican males tended to keep to themselves, as well as modern languages, mathematics and the analytical study of phenomena later called ‘science’.<sup>16</sup> Opie’s later writing was to make reference to this, notably *Temper* (1812) and *Valentine’s Eve* (1816). Dissenting women, in consequence, were able to discuss politics – particularly the events in France – with their male counterparts in a way that seems not to have been possible in the more reactionary culture of the time. David Chandler suggests that there

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<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Jay, ed., *The Journals of John Wesley* (London: Oxford University Press, 1921), p.315.

<sup>15</sup> *Monthly Repository*, 21, p.486.

<sup>16</sup> See Ruth Watts, ‘Knowledge is Power – Unitarians, Gender and Education in the Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Centuries’, *Gender and Education*, 1 (1989), 35-50.

were two main groups of writers at the time, one connected with the Theatre Royal and the other at the Octagon.<sup>17</sup> The latter group, known as the Speculative Society, comprised Amelia Alderson and her father, the Plumptre family, Frank Sayers, William Taylor Jr. and Charles Marsh, under the leadership of William Enfield.

When news of the success of the storming of the Bastille broke in Norwich, there was popular celebration. To many Dissenters, it seemed as though the birth of freedom in France would impel a similar democratic breakthrough in England. Bonfires were lit in the streets and the market place, the wearing of revolutionary dress (such as the Phrygian cap, the tricoloured ribbons and trousers for men and women) was to be seen and the singing of revolutionary songs such as the 'Ca Ira' was heard. Dissenters' expectations were sanguine – not necessarily for a violent revolution in England, but at least for an easing of the several disabilities that were applied to them. As Alan Wharam notes:

It had not escaped [the Dissenters'] notice that the principle of religious equality had been treated as fundamental, both in America and in France: Article X of the French declaration of Rights, as translated in Paine's book, read 'No man ought to be molested on account of his opinions, not even on account of his religious opinions, provided his avowal of them does not disturb the public order as established by law.'<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Chandler, p.2.

<sup>18</sup> Alan Wharam, *The Treason Trials, 1794* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1992) p.15.

One eye-witness account of events at the National Assembly in 1789 which captures this excitement is that of Edward Rigby, nephew of Dr William Taylor, also of Norwich but unrelated to John Taylor:

I have been witness to the most extraordinary revolution that perhaps ever took place in human society. A great and wise people struggled for freedom and the rights of humanity; their courage, prudence and perseverance have been rewarded by success and an event which will contribute to the happiness and prosperity of millions of their posterity has taken place with very little loss of blood and with but a few days interruption of business.<sup>19</sup>

Similarly, on 3 August 1789, Joseph Kinghorn, minister of St Mary's Baptist church in Norwich, wrote in a letter to his father:

I rejoice in my very heart at the destruction of that infamous place, the Bastille, which the populace are regularly demolishing without any interruption from government who evidently dare not meddle with them.<sup>20</sup>

In the following months this feeling of revolutionary optimism persisted in Norwich, whereas nationally the reactionary British government was stepping up measures to ensure that there was no attack on its authority. Spies and agents-provocateurs were sent out from London, and the radical city of Norwich was an obvious target.

Various societies were set up on both sides. 'Church and King' reactionaries set up groups throughout the country, secretly aided, it seems, with government funds laundered through intermediaries. The pro-Jacobins in Norwich established the Revolution Society with William Taylor senior as secretary in 1789. The title was meant to be a disarming reference to the English 'revolution' of 1688, but, as

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<sup>19</sup> Jewson, p.14.

<sup>20</sup> Wilkin Papers, Norfolk County Record Office, Norwich.

Jewson notes, ‘those who formed it undoubtedly had had their eyes on events in France as well’.<sup>21</sup> On the first anniversary of the fall of the Bastille, the Society met at the Maid’s Head Inn on Cook Row, now Wensum Street, drinking to such heady toasts as ‘The Revolution Societies in England’, ‘The Rights of Man’ and ‘The Philosophers of France’. However, the antagonism between the two elements of society and the political parties which represented them, the conservative Orange and Purples and the radical Blue and Whites, spilled over into violence on the second anniversary of Bastille Day in 1791. Jewson records how the Presbyterians in Norwich ‘provided much of the intellectual leadership’ of the Blue and Whites, but few radicals openly toasted France that year.<sup>22</sup>

In April 1792, Taylor wrote to the London Society for Constitutional Information seeking association with them, which was duly endorsed. This Society had been set up as long ago as 1780, with the purpose of disseminating information among its members relating to constitutional reform and government policies. It was also in contact with similar organisations in France. Thomas Holcroft, later to be tried at the Treason Trials in 1794, was a member, and, as a friend of James Alderson, Amelia’s father, enabled informal contact between radicals in the two cities, which extended to Holcroft’s friend William Godwin (1756 – 1836), author of *Political Justice* (1793). Since most contact

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p.17

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p.13

was by letter, these societies were sometimes known as corresponding societies.

William Godwin had early connections with Norwich. Born in the fenland town of Wisbech to a 'Nonconformist family of the middle class', he was sent to school in Norwich during the years 1767 to 1771.<sup>23</sup> His master was the Sandemanian Samuel Newton, described by Woodcock as 'a religious bigot', and whom, he says, Godwin found repugnant.<sup>24</sup> Marshall's later biography of Godwin is less unfavourable to Newton, saying that he was 'no religious bigot', simply a strict enforcer of the code of Sandemanianism, the most extreme form of Calvinism.<sup>25</sup> Marshall notes that it was Newton who Godwin later parodied in his novel *Mandeville* as the tutor Hilkiah Bradford.<sup>26</sup> Godwin seems to have had an unhappy youth, caught between a 'tyrannical' father and the religious zealot Newton.<sup>27</sup> Later, however, in 1794, he was to meet Amelia Opie, 'the Belle of Norwich' according to Godwin's biographer Brown, and she was able to introduce him to the Taylors.<sup>28</sup>

By 11 November 1792, the forces of reaction were well entrenched in Norwich: the press reported that two-thirds of the

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<sup>23</sup> G. Woodcock, *William Godwin: a Biographical Study* (London: Porcupine Press, 1946), p.4.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.

<sup>25</sup> P. H. Marshall, *William Godwin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p.22.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20.

<sup>27</sup> Woodcock, p.7.

<sup>28</sup> Ford K. Brown, *The Life of William Godwin* (London: Dent, 1926), p.79.

Norfolk militia had been embodied, that is, made ready. On the 11 December, it was reported that associations ‘for the preservation of property against republicans and levellers’ had been formed throughout the County, and on 2 January 1793 that all remaining units of militia had been embodied.<sup>29</sup> The initial optimism of 1789 had become tempered with discretion and secrecy among the Dissenters. James Alderson adopted the practice of burning all his letters after receipt, and no doubt other prudent radicals were doing the same. For this reason, very few letters of a political nature survived.

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Amelia Opie’s first writings date from this period, and included at least one play, ‘Adelaide’, written c.1787. The *Norfolk Chronicle* reported a performance of this play which took place on 6 January 1791:

On Thursday last was performed at Mr Plumtree’s [*sic*] in the Close, before a select few, the Tragedy of Adelaide, the production of a lady of this place, whose abilities and accomplishments have long engrossed the public admiration; and we are informed by those who had the pleasure of witnessing the performance, that few modern productions ought to be named with *Adelaide*.<sup>30</sup>

The home of the Reverend Doctor Robert Plumtre, the Prebendary of Norwich, boasted a private theatre, and Amelia Opie and her two friends, Anne and Annabella Plumtre, took the principal parts.

Unfortunately ‘Adelaide’, together with other Opie writings, including

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<sup>29</sup> J. Matchett, ed., *Norfolk and Norwich Remembrances* (Norwich, 1822), unpaginated.

<sup>30</sup> *Norfolk Chronicle*, 8 January 1791, p.3.



her journal, formed part of the Carr Collection of manuscripts which is now missing. However, these manuscripts were intact in 1932 when Margaret MacGregor conducted her extensive research into Opie's works. MacGregor therefore had sight of the script of 'Adelaide'. There were two performances, on 4th and 6th January 1791.<sup>31</sup> 'The dialogue' reports MacGregor 'is often spirited, the characterization often good, and the plot is, on the whole, well-handled'. The plot, as summarised by MacGregor, has several of the ingredients which were to occur in Opie's later writing, namely deception, inheritances, jealousy, murder, misplaced suicide as in *Romeo and Juliet*, and, in a way that prefigures *The Dangers of Coquetry*, *Father and Daughter* and much of Opie's later writing, the pairing of two young women of differing sensibilities. The setting is pre-Revolutionary France, when parental control over marriage was similar to the situation prevailing in England at the time: under the terms of Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act, enacted 1754 and repealed 1823, parents in England and Wales were able to forbid the marriages of their children under the age of twenty-one, if not to actually dissolve them. This was intended to prevent clandestine marriages presented later as a *fait accompli*.<sup>32</sup>

Later both William Godwin and Thomas Holcroft were to respond to a sight of the manuscript of 'Adelaide'. MacGregor quotes from a letter of William Godwin's dated 8 September 1794, which formed part of the Carr Manuscripts. Godwin wrote a friendly critique:

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<sup>31</sup> MacGregor, p.14.

<sup>32</sup> See Caroline Gonda, *Reading Daughters' Fictions, 1709-1834* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p.4.

' Your comedy has, in my opinion, no inconsiderable merit, [and] it agreeably surprised me'.<sup>33</sup> MacGregor also records that Thomas Holcroft wrote a tantalising couplet on the back of the manuscript itself:

At seventeen, when scenes like this occurred  
You promis'd much. Remember! Keep your word.

T.H.

MacGregor notes that Amelia Opie, evidently flattered, could not help but to write below it, 'The above couplet was written in pencil by Mr Holcroft.'<sup>34</sup> In a recent study, David Chandler suggested that 'Holcroft's assessment was surely not just the result of friendly partiality.'<sup>35</sup> Working from the information in MacGregor, he goes on to say that *Adelaide* may well be the first English play to reflect the direct influence of Schiller's *Die Rauber*, although he also points out that no English translation appeared until 1792. This apparent contradiction may be resolved, I suggest, by noticing Opie's longstanding friendship with William Taylor, Jr., who was to establish a reputation as a translator of contemporary German writing and whose translation of Berger's *Lenore* was published in 1790.<sup>36</sup> It may be that this example of German Romanticism inspired *Adelaide*, rather than the Schiller.

Also now missing, but examined by MacGregor, is

<sup>33</sup> MacGregor, p.13.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Chandler, p.102.

<sup>36</sup> MacGregor, p.10.

A Roman play ... written in blank verse, [which] shows the influence of *Julius Caesar*; [also] the second act of another, the theme of which is love and vengeance, [and which] is romantic in its treatment ... The complete synopsis of another play shows Amelia's interest in the Gothic romance. Whether the plays were completed and submitted to managers, we do not know.<sup>37</sup>

There is some suggestion from letters still extant to suggest that at this stage of her development as a writer, Opie saw her future as that of a dramatist rather than a writer of tales. A letter of 1796 to William Godwin, for example, mentions that she has dramatised his work 'The Sorcerer'.<sup>38</sup> Also, a new play is mentioned in a letter to him approximately nine months later.<sup>39</sup> Throughout her youth she was also producing verse in a sentimental and bucolic style, reminiscent of that of William Hayley (1745 – 1820), to whose verse she had been introduced by her mother.<sup>40</sup> In later years, Amelia Opie (as she had become) was to form a close friendship with Hayley until his death, as is evidenced by the several letters still extant.<sup>41</sup>

In 1790, when Opie was twenty, *The Dangers of Coquetry* was published anonymously. The attribution may be verified, however, by referring to a letter from Amelia Opie to Susannah Taylor dated 22

<sup>37</sup> MacGregor, p.13.

<sup>38</sup> Opie to Godwin, 12 February 1796; Godwin Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford: B.Dep.6/210.

<sup>39</sup> Opie to Godwin, before 1 November 1796; Godwin Papers, Bodleian Library, Oxford: B.Dep.6/210.

<sup>40</sup> Opie to William Hayley, 23 January 1813; British Library, Add Mss 30805.

<sup>41</sup> See Appendix: Letters, esp. years 1813 – 1820.

March 1801, which also thanks her for her kind remarks about the work.

Despite Earland's dismissive remark that the tale 'failed to excite attention', it is a piece of writing of considerable interest, not the least because its competent, spare delivery provides it with a refreshing directness and sureness of style which might not be expected given the age of its author.<sup>42</sup> Only two copies of the tale survive, although a new edition is presently under preparation.<sup>43</sup>

Before turning to the text itself, there is an observation to make about Opie's nomenclature. She was always careful to call her works of prose fiction 'tales'. In the letter to Mrs Taylor mentioned above, for example, she writes

I re-read [*The Dangers of Coquetry*] after I married and felt a great respect for it, and if I ever write a collection of tales I shall correct and republish it as I originally wrote it, not as it is now in the shape of a novel in chapters. I believe I told you that Mr Hoare was so struck with it, as to intend writing a play from it – I wish he would!<sup>44</sup>

Often 'tales' formed part of the title, as in *Tales of the Heart* (1820) or *Tales of the Pemberton Family* (1826). When this was not so, the word generally appeared in the sub-title, as in *Father and Daughter: a Tale*, or *Appearance is Against Her: a Tale* (1847). Even her longest and most important work, *Adeline Mowbray* (1805) bears the sub-title *A Tale, in Three Volumes*. Her consistency in this is interesting: it seems evident that she thought inappropriate such alternative

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<sup>42</sup> Ada Earland, *John Opie and His Circle* (London: Hutchinson, 1911), p.157.

<sup>43</sup> Edited by Shelley King. Publication expected by Broadview Press in 2002.

<sup>44</sup> Opie to Susannah Taylor, 22 March 1801; Huntington Library, OP61.

descriptors as ‘romance’ or ‘novel’. Perhaps Opie was aware of the cautionary comments by both Dr Johnson and James Beattie in their respective analyses of the fiction writing of their time. The cautions arise from the dangers inherent in the applicability of the modern romances to everyday life: ‘mischievous effects’, as Dr Johnson calls them.<sup>45</sup> In *The Rambler*, Johnson writes of the dangers inherent in writers taking as their subjects ‘scenes of the universal drama as may be the lot of any ... man’, as distinct from the heroic nature of earlier romances in which ‘every transaction and sentiment was so remote from all that passes among men that the reader was in very little danger of making applications to himself; the virtues and crimes were beyond his sphere of activity.’<sup>46</sup> He writes:

These books are written chiefly to the young, the ignorant and the idle, to whom they serve as lectures of conduct, and introductions into life. ... the highest degree of reverence should be paid to youth and ... nothing indecent should be suffered to approach their eyes or ears.<sup>47</sup>

Opie’s purpose was to write for this very audience. In her youth, it seems, the audience was only slightly more than an extension of herself, liberally educated but, in her motherless state, aware of her vulnerability to the difficulties that faced young women in negotiating a place in what may be termed polite society.

James Beattie’s essay ‘On Fable and Romance’ (1783), which

<sup>45</sup> Samuel Johnson, ‘On Fiction’, *The Rambler*, 4, (April 1750).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

sought to categorise the writing of his day and differentiate it from earlier genres, is also unequivocal about the term 'romance':

'Romances are a dangerous recreation,' he says:

A few, no doubt, of the best may be friendly to good taste and good morals; but far the greater part are unskillfully written, and tend to corrupt the heart, and stimulate the passions. A habit of reading them ... fills the mind with extravagant thoughts, and too often with criminal propensities.<sup>48</sup>

It follows that if she were to avoid her works being seen as 'romances' of the kind Beattie condemns, Opie would have to eschew the descriptor 'romance', even though her tales were romances. 'Novel', too, was a term with connotations that could be misunderstood, tending to be used by the more radical writers of the 1790s.<sup>49</sup> Commenting upon Beattie's essay, Geoffrey Day notes how little the terms 'novel' and 'novel-writer' figure in it. Opie's solution was to use a descriptor that was free of the high-blown and potentially 'dangerous' qualities of 'romance', and also free of the radical associations of the term 'novel'. The word 'tale' has a disarming ingenuousness, as well as moral and didactic connotations: her understanding and usage of this word as connoting something unpretentious but instructive can be seen in the Preface to *Father and Daughter*, which affirms that the work's 'highest pretension is to be a SIMPLE MORAL TALE' and her capitalisation of the phrase emphasises her view of the significance of

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<sup>48</sup> James Beattie, *Dissertations Moral and Critical*, ed. by Geoffrey Day, (London: Routledge, Kegan & Paul, 1986), p.59.

<sup>49</sup> Geoffrey Day, *From Fiction to Novel* (London: Routledge, Kegan & Paul, 1987), p.59.

those reception aspects of prose fiction at the time. The word ‘tales’ was also modish: Harriet Lee, writing of the first publication of her *Canterbury Tales* in 1797 describes ‘tale’ as a narrative which had the characteristic of ‘either abruptly commencing with, or breaking into, a sort of dramatic dialogue’ – as Opie’s tales do – as being ‘a novelty in the fictions of the day.’<sup>50</sup> Perhaps Opie’s friend Elizabeth Inchbald was equally sensitive to these issues of reception. Her work of fiction of a similar time and theme, and with a similarly ingenuous protagonist, is entitled *A Simple Story*: here again we see the disarming, feminising choice of terminology. As Gary Kelly observes: ‘Amelia Opie deliberately wrote “tales” and not “novels”’.<sup>51</sup>

Most of Opie’s prose fiction and poetry fall squarely within the canon of sentimental writing as regards setting, characterisation, plot and particularly diction. Despite the view of Janet Todd and others that the sentimental novel was becoming passé by 1790, it is unsurprising that *The Dangers of Coquetry* has the characteristics of sentimental fiction.<sup>52</sup> A later letter by Opie recalls her preferred reading at this time as being Mme. de Genlis (Stephanie Félicité Ducrest de Saint-Aubin, 1746-1830) and William Hayley (1745 – 1820), both writers in this genre.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> In Anne K. Mellor, *Romanticism and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1993), p.8.

<sup>51</sup> Gary Kelly, ‘Amelia Opie, Lady Caroline Lamb, and Maria Edgeworth: Official and Unofficial Ideology’ in J. Vinson, ed., *Novelists and Prose Writers* (London: Macmillan, 1979), p.936.

<sup>52</sup> Janet Todd, *Sensibility* (London: Methuen, 1986), p.130.

<sup>53</sup> Amelia Opie to William Hayley, 28 January 1813; British Library, Add. Mss. 39871.

The sentimental tale is defined by Janet Todd as having the following characteristics:

The arousal of pathos through conventional situations, stock familial characters and rhetorical devices.... Such literature buttonholes the reader and demands an emotional, even physical response.<sup>54</sup>

It was this arousal that caused Hester Chapone to write to her Young Lady advising her to avoid such sentimental fiction.<sup>55</sup> Conversely, Hannah More encouraged her readers to be 'alive to every woe by fiction dress'd', so that they may better understand the human condition in real life.<sup>56</sup> As Jane Spencer points out, the catharsis of reading the sentimental novel was not to be seen as an end in itself: it had to give rise to 'benevolent feelings' which in turn produced 'charitable action' by the reader rather than 'sensation for its own sake'.<sup>57</sup> Harriet Guest, in discussing Anna-Laetitia Barbault, takes the view that the sentimental novel was gendered feminine.<sup>58</sup> Spencer's earlier analysis corresponded with this, tracing two lines of development in novel-writing in the eighteenth century: that of Smollett and that of Richardson. She sees Richardson's style as being

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<sup>54</sup> Todd, p2.

<sup>55</sup> Hester Chapone, *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady* 3 vols., (London: 1773), 2, p.125.

<sup>56</sup> Hannah More, 'Sensibility: a Poetical Epistle' (1782), quoted by J. Mullan, 'Sentimental Novels' in John Richetti, ed., *The Eighteenth-Century Novel* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 248.

<sup>57</sup> Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p.78.

<sup>58</sup> Harriet Guest, 'Eighteenth Century Femininity: a supposed sexual characteristic' in Vivian Jones, ed., *Women and Literature in Britain 1700-1800* (London: CUP, 2000), p.54.



the model that 'women [were] more likely to follow'.<sup>59</sup> This sentimental style, with its 'tender feeling and delicacy of expression' was thus a 'conflation of literary and feminine values'.<sup>60</sup> Jan Fergus, on the other hand, argues that to see the readership of sentimental fiction as exclusively female is an 'anecdotal and circular' assumption. The latter argument can be supported by citing male reactions, such as those of Sir Walter Scott and Prince Hoare, to reading Amelia Opie's sentimental *Father and Daughter*.<sup>61</sup>

Mullan points out how the meaning of the term 'sentimental' appeared to shift by the end of the eighteenth century as signalling an unwarranted self-indulgence in 'superficial emotion'. For example, the delightful possibilities of misunderstanding that he indicates may be seen in Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey* (1768), which appeal to a sophistry in the reader, are entirely absent in both *The Dangers of Coquetry* and *Father and Daughter*.<sup>62</sup> Todd explains that the sentimental novel fell out of favour at that time because, whereas the ultra-conservative *Anti-Jacobin Review* claimed that it was a product of Jacobinism, radicals considered the set characters and situations of sentimentalism unworldly and thereby removed from the revolutionary struggle.<sup>63</sup> This view is shared by Chris Jones.<sup>64</sup> Markman Ellis,

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<sup>59</sup> Spencer, p.90.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.77.

<sup>61</sup> Jan Fergus, 'Women Readers: a case study' in Jones, ed., p.184.

<sup>62</sup> Mullan in Richetti, ed., p.236.

<sup>63</sup> Todd, pp. 129-130.

<sup>64</sup> See Chris Jones, 'Radical Sensibility in the 1790s' in *Reflections of Revolution:*

however, shows none of the reluctance noted by Brissenden to 'confront directly the question of what is or was meant by sentimentalism or sensibility'.<sup>65</sup> Ellis contests this critical 'consensus', claiming it to be 'unjustified' and illustrating his argument with satirical sources such as Gillray and Canning.<sup>66</sup> The root of his argument seems to lie in the rapid expansion of published fiction in the late eighteenth century, which allowed 'unprecedented access by the young, the under-educated and women.'<sup>67</sup> Passing over the gender implications of this categorisation, Ellis points out that the taste of this expanding new market was for the emotional excesses of sentimentalism. The genre therefore continued to flourish despite the distaste felt for it by the intellectuals of the time. It must be said that both Opie's first two tales, *The Dangers of Coquetry* and *Father and Daughter* (1801), are sentimental tales by Todd's definition. *Father and Daughter*, far from being outmoded by the date of its publication, was Opie's best-selling work and ran to nine editions. The reason for its popularity was exactly the emotional catharsis that Todd and others claim had become *passé*. The success of Opie's writing during the 1790s and the first decades of the nineteenth century suggests that there was still a considerable market for sentimental prose. The success of her *Adeline Mowbray*, parts of which interrogate Godwin's

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*Images of Revolution*, eds. Alison Yarrington and Kelvin Everest (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 68-82, p.68.

<sup>65</sup> R. F. Brissenden, *Virtue in Distress* (London: Macmillan, 1974), p.11.

<sup>66</sup> Markman Ellis, *The Politics of Sensibility* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.191.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, p.193.

*Political Justice* and *Caleb Williams* suggests a complex pattern of readership during these years in which both sentimental and philosophical works found audiences.

The two surviving copies of *The Dangers of Coquetry* are in octavo, bearing the information on the title pages 'LONDON Printed for W.Lane, Leadenhall Street MDCCXC'. There is a verse on the title page of each of the two volumes which is unattributed. Since Opie was to be scrupulous in attributing such envoys in her future works and no other source for this one has been found, I assume it to have been written by herself:

On each fond fool bestowing some kind glance,  
Each conquest owing to some loose advance:  
The vain COQUETTES affect to be persued,  
And think they're virtuous if not grossly lewd.<sup>68</sup>

Reading the tale, one is reminded of her playwriting experience: the characters are clearly defined in contrasting pairs; their introduction is orderly, sequential, and so managed as to maximise the contrasts. There are no superfluous characters cluttering up the narrative; neither is there description of set or setting – a feature of her writing which was to be consistent through her creative career, and one with which a playwright might easily identify.

The heroine of the tale is a young woman of seventeen, Louisa Conolly, in possession of all the virtues of appearance and sensibility, worth more than £100,000, but who, having lost her mother at an early

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<sup>68</sup> [Amelia Opie] *The Dangers of Coquetry*, 2 vols. (London: W. Lane, 1790), title

age, feels a consequent lack of ‘restraint’ and ‘guidance’ in her entry into the social world (I, 7). Louisa has a friend, Caroline, who has none of her advantages, but who has plainness and prudence in place of the vanity and ‘thoughtless indiscretion’ which will be Louisa’s fatal flaws (I, 3). Indeed, a suitable epigram for the tale might have been from the first line of Haywood’s tale *Betsy Thoughtless* (1751), which reads: ‘fewer women were undone by love than vanity.’<sup>69</sup> After a succession of beaux, Louisa meets Mortimer, the dark, handsome, wholesome hero. Mortimer is attracted to Louisa, but put off by her ‘disposition to coquetry’ (I, 30). However, he overcomes his reservations and marries Louisa, bearing her ‘weeping on his bosom from the abode of her ancestors’ to London. Eschewing a heavy-handed authoritarianism, he resolves that he will guide her extrovert personality ‘by silken chains or not at all’ (I, 125). He is thus established by Opie as a young man of sensibility, which may be seen as a positive attribute, but this very sensibility is also the flaw in his character: it will lead him to be remiss in performing a crucial task of guidance and restraint later in the tale. In London, Louisa meets the black-clad widow Mrs. Belmour. Having been passed over by the rake Lord Ormington, Belmour decides to use this *ingenue* to get even with him. Ormington, in turn, is affianced to Lady Jane Bertie: according to the rules of society, this status, and Louisa’s own, puts him off-limits for her flirtatious smiles,

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page. Subsequent quotations are from this edition and included in parentheses in the text.

<sup>69</sup> Elizabeth Haywood, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, ed. by Dale Spender (London: Pandora, 1986), p.1.

despite Belmour's encouragements.

Like the end of the act before the interval, the first volume closes with the audience being aware of Louisa's terrible innocence, her precociousness, her joyful anticipation of her 'entrance to the gay and fashionable world' (I, 125), but knowing that there is to be a struggle with the black-garbed Lady Belmour for Louisa's good name and happiness.

In the second volume Ormington, like Lovelace in Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747), becomes obsessed with Louisa on meeting her at Ranelagh, despite his engagement to Jane Bertie. Opie's description of the flattery Louisa feels from his fascination with her is entirely consistent with the flaw in her nature which was evident early in the first volume. The double standards of society enable Ormington to flirt with Louisa without censure from the rest of society, although he himself is hardly a character that the reader will not censure. This same tolerance, however, does not apply to Louisa and the worldly-wise Mortimer is apprehensive that her flirtatious behaviour towards Ormington will not be tolerated. He resolves to reprimand Louisa, but does not do so because he is moved to tears by an act of charity which Louisa secretly performs and which he discovers. Fortunately, Louisa recognises her impropriety and resolves to 'bestow no more on Lord Ormington those seducing smiles which had made him forget the claim of Lady Jane' (II, 63). Six pages later, however, her resolution is put to the test - and fails. With Mortimer away, Belmour tempts Louisa to attend a ball where Ormington and Lady Jane will also be present, and

she goes, for 'where is the merit in being virtuous, while unassailed by temptation?' (II, 69) Belmour, in sight of her objective, feeds Louisa's vanity so that she becomes 'too lively to think, and giving way to the natural gaiety of her disposition, she excited the envy and censure of her own sex, while she engrossed the attention of the other' (II, 83). As a result of this 'thoughtless indiscretion', she is called an 'infernal coquette' by Jane Bertie's brother (II, 84). Afterwards, she is repentant and 'resolves to live for [her husband] alone, and renounce [her] follies for ever' (II, 88).

The reader of today may be forgiven for failing to detect the aspects of Louisa's behaviour that cause her to be stigmatised as a coquette. She seems to possess the behaviours and attitudes that one might expect any spirited, wealthy and sociable young woman to have. And yet, she is described early in the novel as 'at eighteen, a finished coquette' (II, 4). Fortunately for the modern reader, Amelia Opie offers two definitions of coquetry. The first appears in the envoy, quoted above, with the warning in the last line: just because a young woman can see herself as not being 'grossly lewd' does not mean that in the eyes of the world she is not a coquette. The second definition is put into the mouth of the principal male character in the tale, Henry Mortimer, whose gender reinforces the significance of the statement:

To take pains to destroy the happiness of others, to wound an inexperienced heart for the sake of wounding it; to seduce lovers from their affianced brides, husbands from their wives, and all to gratify a thirst of admiration and a despicable vanity ... this is the conduct of a finished coquette. (II, 42)

These two statements reveal that a coquette is a young woman whose behaviour is flirtatious, seeking to rouse passion but not to gratify it, and, as the above quotation suggests, is motivated by vanity rather than sexual desire. This corresponds with our view of that time as being one in which women were often perceived as little more than social and decorative adjuncts in a construct of society which was overwhelmingly male. However, the male equivalent of the coquette, known as the libertine, was, at least to Mortimer, equally reprehensible: 'A coquette in your sex is as detestable as a libertine in ours,' he says (II, 37). The distinction is one of sexual gratification: whereas the coquette is flirtatious, she is not sexual. She aims to inspire desire but not fulfil it, for to do so would probably bar her from the very society she enjoys - as will be seen in this and other novels of the type. The male libertine, however, is sexualised, and, like Ormington here, or Richardson's Lovelace, knows that he has the permission of society, and to a large extent its forgiveness, to carry on a life of promiscuity. Opie demonstrates very clearly in this novel that she is aware of this permissiveness, and also aware that for the young woman the opposite applies: a zero tolerance of anything considered unseemly.

To return to the tale: unfortunately, it is too late for Louisa's resolutions. Mortimer hears of his wife's coquetry and of Bertie's accusation. He is obliged - by this same rigid social code of behaviour - to fight a duel with Bertie. He does so, is wounded 'past recovery' and expires nobly in her lap (II, 121). Working squarely within the

canon of sentimental writing, Opie has Louisa miscarry the following morning (we had been informed only fleetingly of her pregnancy beforehand). The impact, both literal and symbolic, of this event is considerable, and points up the distinction between sentiment and mere sentimentality in Opie's tale. Louisa herself then dies in a theatrical tableau which prefigures most of Opie's heroines' deaths (Agnes in *Father and Daughter*, Adeline in *Adeline Mowbray*, for examples). At her bedside are the beneficiaries of her charity, now rehabilitated. Her death is her nemesis, and, given the rigidity of social convention, as inevitable as that of Clarissa Harlowe. Of the libertine Ormington nothing further is said, nor need be, since Opie's purpose is served by the deaths of Louisa and Mortimer, neither of whom are malefactors, and their child. This narrative neatness and economy is in contrast to her next published tale, *Father and Daughter* (1801), which dilates post-climactically and unnecessarily on the remorse of the libertine.

The male view of womanhood in this tale is concerned with appearances and with woman as commodity. Conversely, the female view is concerned with woman as she is beneath the outer layer of appearance. These views come into being because woman is seen as being sentimental at the expense of rationality. John Gregory, for example, in common with other conduct book writers of this period, writes of a young woman's 'superior delicacy'.<sup>70</sup> The attitude spanned various ideological and political categories. For the conservative,

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<sup>70</sup> John Gregory, MD, 'A Father's Legacy to his Daughter' (1774) in *Female Education in the Age of Enlightenment*, ed. Janet Todd, 6 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1996), 2, p.5.



James Fordyce warned women that ‘Nature seems to have formed the faculties of your sex for the most part with less vigour than those of ours.’<sup>71</sup> Even Rousseau, exponent of social democracy, argued that women must be restrained to save them from their own overactive sensibilities.<sup>72</sup> These views of women predicate a vulnerability and a need for protection, even confinement, exemplified by the diminished legal personality which women had to tolerate in terms, for example, of their loss of title, in certain circumstances, to property on marriage, or for the review of the custom of dower during the eighteenth century.<sup>73</sup>

The women depicted in Opie’s tale exist in a male-ordered world and it is necessary for their survival that they also understand and are seen to subscribe to the male view. They are thus required to operate two systems of perception in tandem: the dominant (male) one which in this case concerns appearance and the subordinate perception of the female. The possibilities for subversion in the subordinate are manifold. This bi-focalism is not too removed from Luce Irigaray’s concepts of ‘spheres of language’ in which she envisages two overlapping circles, one circle being a male linguistic domain, the other female. The area of overlap indicates that part of the male

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<sup>71</sup> James Fordyce, DD, ‘Sermons to Young Women’ (1766) in Janet Todd, *Female Education in the Age of the Enlightenment*, 6 vols. (London: Pickering & Chatto, 1996), 2, p.272.

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, J. J. Rousseau, *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, trans. Philip Stewart (Hanover, NH: University of New England Press, 1997).

<sup>73</sup> For a full discussion of the legal aspects of women and property, see Susan Staves, *Married Women’s Separate Property* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), pp.1-4.

domain in which women have acquired competence as a means of survival. This appropriation is only one-way, female to male, because of the domination of the male language and construct of the world, which Irigaray refers to as the Law of the Father.<sup>74</sup> Opie's writing relates to Irigaray's 'spheres' as expressions of hierarchy, dealing as it does with gender-based ways of perception.<sup>75</sup> Opie is able to manipulate her use of language very skillfully so that the reader (especially the female reader) becomes aware of this bi-focal view, thereby presenting two modern and opposing views of womanhood that reinforce this bi-focalism of appearance and actuality.

This is made evident in Opie's depiction of Louisa's female view of Ormington's fiancée Jane Bertie in contrast with the male view of Mortimer, and depends on sophisticated rendering of different word-choice. Whilst Louisa sees Jane as 'insipid', 'unmeaning' and 'insignificant', Mortimer finds her 'interesting and artless' and 'delicate but expressive' (II,18). Opie is marshalling two opposing gazes at what is recognisably the same person here, and presenting their different perceptions very succinctly. Mortimer's descriptors indicate a view consisting of a layering of rococo and bucolic stylistic conventions over Louisa's regard of Jane, which penetrates to the reality of the girl herself. Amelia Opie is manipulating her language very skilfully to show gender-driven perceptions: the male sees the

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<sup>74</sup> See Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One*, trans. Catherine Parker and Carolyn Burke (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), esp. pp.136-7.

<sup>75</sup> For a discussion of gender differences in perception, see, for example, Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* (Chicago, 1984).

superficial style, the female, regarding another female, sees the person. This distinction is crucial to the presentation of the characters and the view either gender takes of them: an observation which, to some degree at least, can also be made about the principals in *Father and Daughter*, *Adeline Mowbray* and *Appearance is Against Her*.

Opie communicates this dichotomy of view by the careful development of her main characters. It is evident that her earlier experience with dramatic writing enabled her to marshal a well-differentiated yet complementary range of plausible characters from the realms of the *haute bourgeoisie* and petty aristocrats of her time, and to manipulate them effectively and realistically so that sufficient dramatic tension was created to impel the tale to its conclusion. The construction of the foil, Caroline, is in pointed contrast to Louisa. Caroline is described as having 'all those perfections Louisa wanted. She was not beautiful [or accomplished, but] she had an exquisite sense of propriety ... charitable, and even tempered' (I, 9-10). She, too, is without a mother. Her father, unlike Louisa's wealthy parent, is bankrupt and has to live economically in Lausanne and Paris. The convention of the paired characters is a well-used technique in eighteenth-century novels of this type: the letters of Julia and Caroline in Maria Edgeworth's *Letters for Literary Ladies* (1795), Eliza and Lucy in Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797), Hannah Primrose and Rebecca Rhymer in Elizabeth Inchbald's *Nature and Art* (1796), even Richardson's Clarissa Harlowe and Anna Howe illustrate the frequency with which this convention was employed.

However, the tension is created not just through the contrast of the protagonist Louisa with her virtuous foil Caroline, but also with the experienced 'hoyden' Emily Hamilton. The tale is thus sustained by a triangular structure rather than a simple binary opposition. Hamilton has married, become widowed and reconstructed herself as the Lady Belmour, a plausible contraction of 'bel amour', and a name Opie would use again for a similar character in the tale 'A Woman's Love and a Wife's Duty' (1820). Lady Belmour now appears in society as 'Amongst the leaders of the *ton*,' (I,125), superficially polished, perhaps in a way that Mary Warner in Opie's 1805 tale *Adeline Mowbray* would like to think of herself, but intrinsically vulgar and corrupt – a further example of the tension between appearance and reality which is at the root of the bifocalism in this tale. This dualism is signalled by her apparel. Wearing black may not only denote widowhood, but also evil intent, and the drabness of the colour is further, and contradictorily, suggestive of Dissenting (especially Quaker) rectitude. The base desire for revenge motivates Belmour. Having been jilted by Ormington, she 'fixes on Louisa as the future vehicle of her malice and revenge' (I,133).

As the plot moves forward, the reader is aware of a further bifocal view: whereas the virtuous but not unworldly Mortimer sees Louisa's flirtation with the fickle Ormington 'with pain, fearful lest it should wear the censure of the world' (II, 27), Mrs Belmour, the vindictive manipulator, 'on the contrary, rejoiced at Louisa's conquest' (II, 28). The differentiation here rests on motive, and so the reader is

made aware of the development of dramatic tension in the action arising from the entrapment of Louisa.

Just as even the modern reader can perceive that Louisa's situation is coming close to being irretrievable, Opie presents another facet of her personality which has been indicated in the first volume: her sympathy for the deserving poor. Louisa sees

a young woman whose dress bespoke the extreme of poverty; yet an endeavour at neatness, visible amidst her rags, [which] convinced [Louisa that] carelessness had no share in her tattered appearance. ... Her countenance was the image of despair, and the paleness of her cheeks seemed occasioned by disease as much as sorrow. (II, 49-50)

This pathetic image of poverty falls squarely within the canons of the sentimental tradition, where it exists, as here, as a means for the writer to display the sensitivity to the sufferings of the less-fortunate. Janet Todd points out how the 'liberal concerns' of Dissenting writers such as Opie 'were reinforced by sentimental interests in the deprived.'<sup>76</sup> Images of the poor or dispossessed reappear often in future writing by Amelia Opie, examples from her prose work being *Father and Daughter*, *Adeline Mowbray*, 'A Woman's Love and a Wife's Duty' in *Tales of the Heart* (1820) and *Tales of the Pemberton Family* (1826). Here, as with aspects of the father-daughter relationship discussed above, Opie's presentation is highly conventional in terms of the didactic parameters of sentimental fiction of the time.

In this description, it is clear that 'carelessness' has no part in the poor woman's appearance: the character has not become slovenly

and is making the best of her situation. She is clearly a member of the deserving poor. Thematically, this virtue in the face of difficulty connects across class boundaries with Caroline. Louisa, a sensible and affluent member of society, enquires the source of the misery of the young pauper, learns that it is financial and no fault of its victim, and pays the debt for her. Like the heroines of Richardson's *Clarissa* and of Opie's *Adeline Mowbray* and other works, even in dire times she is aware of her duties to what Clarissa Harlowe terms as 'my poor'. This use of money is characteristic of the young woman of sensibility, who, in Janet Todd's words, 'benefits others, usually with exemplary prudence, and receives rapt gratitude in return.'<sup>77</sup> Todd briefly discusses the gender-differenced use of money for those of sensibility, explaining how a woman might use it 'in the manner of sensibility instead of commerce.'<sup>78</sup> The thread of charity runs throughout Opie's work: in *Adeline Mowbray* she refers to it as 'doing good by stealth.'<sup>79</sup> In that tale, Opie then provides a gendered example of giving money to the poor in the manipulative promises made by O'Carrol to the poor cottagers, in such proximity that the gender differences are a striking example of a subversion of the narrative convention.

In *The Dangers of Coquetry*, Louisa's charity is an act vital to the progression of the narrative towards its climax, for Mortimer found

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<sup>76</sup> Todd, 1986, p.11.

<sup>77</sup> Todd, p.81.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p.119.

<sup>79</sup> Amelia Opie, *Adeline Mowbray* ed. by Shelley King and John B. Pierce (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.58.

her action so meritorious that, 'delighted with her sensibility, and feeling his whole soul melt into tenderness, he could not bear the thoughts of giving her pain....' by calling her to task over her behaviour toward Ormington (II,60). His lapse of duty is crucial, and ultimately results in his own death.

Louisa dies of a morbidity brought on by guilt. Who is to blame for this gruesome climax? It can be argued that Mortimer's vacillation from his manly duty in disciplining his wife is *his* heroic flaw, resulting in the death of that which he loves best, in an inversion of the *Othello* plot. Mortimer has a duty to instruct his wife, and is negligent in performing it. The world in which these characters move is a male construct, and it therefore falls on the protective husband to make his wife aware of the rules governing this construct. This is particularly significant in Louisa's case, since, like many fictional heroines, she had no mother to instruct her. The male duty of care is the corollary of the filial duty of obedience, and both are transferred from father to husband on the marriage. It is an awareness of the seriousness of this lapse of duty on Mortimer's part that justifies his death, for his lapse has been a major factor in causing the death of Louisa.

Ultimately, however, the message of the tale is that Louisa's vanity is the author of her grief and destruction, and that of two other human beings, notwithstanding the deathbed re-appearance of the poor woman and her child, now made whole, who only add poignancy to the final tableau, allowing Louisa to expire with the words "'Father of Mercies, let *these* plead for me'" (II,133). Louisa's expiry is the

penultimate paragraph. The moral of the tale quickly follows:

For the perusal of the thoughtless and the young is this tale given to the world - it teaches that *indiscretions* may produce as fatal effects as ACTUAL GUILT, and that even the appearance of *impropriety* cannot be too carefully avoided. (II,133)

In Opie's depiction of Louisa and the morality of her fate, one is reminded of Frances Burney's remark about her Evelina: 'I have not pretended to show the world as it actually is, but as it *appears* to a girl of seventeen.'<sup>80</sup> In this case, both Opie and her protagonist are close enough to Burney's 'seventeen' to share the same adolescent apprehensions of the consequences of social indiscretion. In terms of this foregrounding of 'indiscretion' as distinct from 'actual guilt', Chandler usefully points out the similarities of this concluding moral to Fielding's Dedication in *Tom Jones*.<sup>81</sup> Fielding writes:

I have endeavoured strongly to inculcate that Virtue and Innocence can scarce ever be injured but by Indiscretion; and that it is this alone which often betrays them into the snares that Villainy and Deceit spread for them. A moral which I have the more industriously laboured, as the teaching it is, of all others, the likeliest to be attended with Success; since, I believe, it is much easier to make good Men wise, than to make bad Men good.<sup>82</sup>

The issues of guilt, indiscretion, intention and ability to reform are all gender-driven, and the comparison with *Tom Jones* is highly appropriate since the fate of Opie's protagonist is in stark contrast with

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<sup>80</sup> Frances Burney, *The Diary and Letters of Mme. D'Arblay* 2 vols., (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1927), I, p.22.

<sup>81</sup> Chandler, p.19.

<sup>82</sup> See Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones*, eds. J. Bender & S. Stern (London: Oxford University Press, 1996), p.v.



that of Fielding's hero. It is evident that Opie follows convention in her treatment of Louisa's fate: the female protagonist who is not given the opportunity to reform in the way that male libertines are, such as Tom Jones and Robert Lovelace, is thoroughly conventional.

In *The Dangers of Coquetry*, the young Opie shows a clear awareness of the social mores of her time, and her tale may be compared with Inchbald's *A Simple Story*, published only one year later, for the way in which inappropriate flirtatiousness leads to moral guilt. Whether or not she is attempting to criticise them by pointing to Louisa's naivety and lack of malicious intent, and therefore the inappropriateness of the penalty she pays, is open to interpretation. It is possible to read the tale as a radical critique of these double standards, although not particularly convincingly. However, even if her treatment of Louisa is no more than a reiteration of a conventional situation, this need not reduce its significance. The injustice of Louisa's death, and that of Mortimer, for misdemeanours of a comparatively trivial nature is clearly contrasted with the much greater connivings of Ormington the libertine and Mrs Belmour the manipulator, both of whom suffer no loss. Louisa's downfall is the result of no more than indiscretion, the youthful response to the excitement of being seen as desirable. This is a feature of much of Opie's other writing, and here as elsewhere she takes pains partially to exculpate her heroine by carefully indicating causal factors.

The consistent message is, as we saw in the envoy, that it is not

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sufficient to avoid being 'grossly lewd' – society will take steps to ostracise a young woman simply for the appearance of misconduct. With such a one-sided system in place, it is hardly surprising that the dangers of social obloquy were enormous for a young woman, especially when contrasted with the sexual permissiveness which young men often enjoyed.

Tensions between inner and outer drive the narrative in *The Dangers of Coquetry*: in this case, tension between the keen emotions of youth and the circumscribed behaviours and etiquettes of polite society. Louisa, the protagonist, is carefully described by Opie very early in the novel in terms of her emotional characteristics and her accomplishments. It is only several pages later that the reader is given any physical descriptors, and these are trivial by comparison: we are told only that she has 'a profusion of pale brown hair' and blue eyes (I, 34). In Opie's portrayal of her heroine, the external is constantly diminished in favour of expressions of character, by contrast with the male gaze, as depicted in Mortimer's comments. Opie constructs her protagonist primarily for the female reader by emphasising characteristics rather than outward appearance, and only secondarily for the male reader by having the external features signal her emotional characteristics:

[Louisa was] more than beautiful: her countenance expressed every emotion of her soul, and her voice was the tone of persuasion: when she walked, danced or sung, every eye pursued, and every tongue applauded her, and silent attention paid its tribute of admiration.

(p.2)

Having offered a vision of perfection, Opie follows with a description of the fatal flaw, and then recovers with an expression of her protagonist's vulnerability. The final sentence indicates an understanding of the way in which we are often condemned to repeat our errors:

... but Louisa was the slave of thoughtless indiscretion. Though possessed of an understanding superior to that of most of her sex, she was hurried by unguarded levity into the commission of follies, which the weakest of it would have shunned and condemned. Vanity and love of admiration had possession of her heart. (pp.2-3)

Nevertheless, Louisa had sensibility:

she loved and felt for all: her ear was ever open to the tale of the distressed, and those whom her thoughtlessness wounded, her heart bled to heal. She was therefore constantly repenting of her errors, and she would retire from the assemblies where she was the idol of the crowd to lament her broken resolutions and to form fresh ones for the morrow. (p.4)

The implication here is that Amelia Opie is writing in such a way that almost any young *bourgeoise* of eighteen could identify herself in these descriptions, at least to some degree. In many ways she is also writing about herself, perhaps thereby exorcising a fear of social ostracism that must have haunted her. One feels that, like many other young women in her position, she must have trodden a narrow line between daring, intelligent, radical vivacity and the perils of coquetry. Of her sentimental experience, MacGregor, with access to archival material no longer traceable and engaging with the same sentimental idiom, writes:

She knew the excitement ... of being flattered and courted. Her soft, expressive eyes, her auburn hair, her plaintive singing, soon brought her admirers. In later years she admitted the 'girlish imprudence' of love at sixteen, but who the gentleman was, we do not know.<sup>83</sup>

The characteristics indicated here are present in her protagonist Louisa. One feels that the work reveals the awakening of a young writer's awareness of the one-sided way in which society restricts and condemns young women to the degree that a lack of decorum in what were, after all, supposed to be exciting social situations could easily result in total ostracism. Physically, Opie's description of Louisa is very close to a description of herself. Brightwell notes that her hair 'was abundant and beautiful, of auburn hue, and waving in long tresses' which is confirmed by John Opie's portrait of her painted in 1798.<sup>84</sup> Her blue eyes were also the subject of several admiring comments.<sup>85</sup>

Ruth Watts summarises the behaviours advocated by the conduct books of the day as being 'modesty, restraint, passivity, compliance, submission, delicacy and, most important of all, chastity' while pointing out that the education necessary to produce such a paragon of virtue was conspicuously lacking.<sup>86</sup> It will be seen that Louisa fails in the majority of these behaviours simply by being naïve and lacking in instruction. The piecemeal and confused education

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<sup>83</sup> MacGregor, p.9.

<sup>84</sup> John Opie, RA, 'Amelia Opie', 1798 National Portrait Gallery, London.

<sup>85</sup> Brightwell, p.50.

<sup>86</sup> Ruth Watts, *Gender, Power and the Unitarians in England 1760-1860* (London: Longman, 1998), p.19.

which a young woman of the day would have received is a significant contributor to their vulnerability. This paradox was identified by Hannah More in the opening remarks in the Introduction to her 'Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education' (1799):

It is a singular injustice, which is often exercised towards women, first to give them a very defective education, and then to expect from them the most undeviating purity of conduct; - to train them in such a manner as shall lay them open to the most dangerous faults, and then to censure them for not proving faultless.<sup>87</sup>

A similar point is made by Wollstonecraft when discussing the 'Lack of Learning' available to women.<sup>88</sup>

The second, and inter-related point, is the feature of Louisa's motherlessness, and the special significance it has for a young woman in terms of her class and temperament. The major circumstance which connects the writer and her character is that both lack a mother-figure at this critical stage of their lives. On page 7 of the novel, she records Louisa's feelings of a lack of 'restraint' and 'guidance' due to her motherlessness. Amelia Opie's mother, who died when she was fifteen, was described by her daughter as being 'firm in principle as she was gentle in disposition'.<sup>89</sup> Her early death, according to Brightwell, 'bereaved her daughter of a mother's care and guidance at the most critical period of a woman's life.'<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Hannah More, 'Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education' in *Works* (London, 1863), p.ix.

<sup>88</sup> See Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (London: Price, 1792), pp.40-42.

<sup>89</sup> Brightwell, p.12.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.

The significance of a watchful mother is expressed in many of the conduct books of the time, most of which ‘tended to discuss society – whether they spoke of men’s actions or politics, or women’s behaviours – in terms of the disposal of women’s bodies’.<sup>91</sup> Of these, *Advice from a Lady of Quality to Her Children*, attributed to Louis-Antoine de Caraccioli (1719-1803), published in French in 1778 and translated into English by Samuel Glasse in several editions from 1778 onwards, was extremely popular in both languages and on both sides of the Atlantic. It contains many salutary precepts for a young woman about to enter society. In ‘Conference X’, the Lady writes to her daughter:

I have long wished, my dear Daughter, for this opportunity of freely conversing with you on subjects of the utmost consequence to you. Your youth, the world into which you are going, the snares which it lays, ... all induce me to open my heart to you, and to give you some instructions relative to your dangerous situation. If you are so unhappy as to give yourself up to the distraction of the world, you will no longer be able to maintain the dominion over your own heart .... The world is never to be satisfied: the more we bestow upon it, the more unreasonable are its demands. Your sex requires the utmost circumspection; what among MEN is reputed a venial fault, is an absolute crime with us. If you are over-solicitous to please others, you will run into a ridiculous affectation. ... A woman, who sets herself to draw the attention and admiration of all upon her, will soon become an arrant coquette, if she is not one already.<sup>92</sup>

The phrases ‘utmost consequence’, ‘dangerous situation’, ‘utmost

<sup>91</sup> William Hill, *The Power of Sympathy* and Hannah Webster Foster, *The Coquette*, ed. Carla Mulford (New York: Penguin Books, 1996), p.271.

<sup>92</sup> Louis-Antoine de Caraccioli, *Advice from a Lady of Quality to Her Children*, trans. Samuel Glasse (Boston: Cornhill, 1796), p102.

circumspection' and 'absolute crime' make clear the serious issues involved. This seriousness is emphasised in Amelia Opie's tale, in which not only does the coquette Louisa die of grief and the after-effects of a miscarriage, but the tale demands the life of her noble husband and the miscarried baby. Further, the differentiation made between a man's 'venial fault' and a woman's 'absolute crime' for the same act of sexual aggression again signals the hypocrisy of this rigid social code.

Opie's mother died in December 1784. She felt the loss keenly, and seven years later, in 1791, on visiting Cromer for the first time since her mother's death, recalled her memory in a sonnet. Eleven years later, it appears she was still grieving. Her poem 'Epistle to a Friend on New Year's Day, 1802' becomes a requiem for her mother:

Remembrance whispers, when the new-born year  
 In time long past, by numbers hailed, drew near,  
 To me it gave, Alas! misfortune birth,...  
 That hour my mother closed her eyes on earth.  
 Moment to me with every danger fraught,  
 Though on those dangers then I little thought;  
 Such was my youth, the blow was big with fate,  
 Yet such my youth I could not feel its weight.<sup>93</sup>  
 (ll.53- 60)

Later in the poem (ll. 94-95), she recalls her mother's exacting influence in a way that seems singularly appropriate to our present purpose: 'But, lost instructor, monitor most dear, /Nor too indulgent found, nor too severe'. The choice of the words 'instructor' and 'monitor' in particular bear out the sentiments of the Lady of Quality,

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<sup>93</sup> Opie, 1808, p.62.

above.

By the time these lines were written, Opie's mother had been dead for seventeen years, during which time she had grown from a girl of fifteen to a married woman, safely negotiating, as far as we can ascertain, the snares of early adulthood. Only at this stage of maturity, as the poem subsequently makes clear, does she have the hindsight to recognise with regret how 'Time was, when gaily hurrying from thy sight / From home I flew abroad to seek delight' (ll.98-99). She longs to 'Tell thee, that, tost upon the world's wide sea, / Too soon, alas, I learnt to sigh for thee' (ll.116-117).

It is perhaps not surprising that motherlessness is to be a feature of other tales by Opie throughout her writing life. In *Father and Daughter* (1801), the protagonist Agnes, in thrall to her father, can only find female support from her old nurse Fanny, who does not have the authority to instruct or reprove her. In describing the young protagonist of *Appearance is Against Her* (1847), brought up by an aunt, Opie says, echoing Caraccioli, 'her wish to please everyone makes her appear coquettish'.<sup>94</sup> In 'Love, Mystery and Superstition', one of the tales in *Tales of the Heart* (1820), Opie describes the perils of disobedience to the mother. However, it is also clear that the device of the motherless daughter figures frequently in the literature of the period. One need only think of Moll Flanders; Sophia Western in *Tom Jones*; Arabella in *The Female Quixote*; Betsy Thoughtless in Haywood's eponymous tale; Miss Milner in Inchbald's *A Simple*

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<sup>94</sup> Amelia Opie, *Appearance is Against Her* (London: Grove, 1847), p.15.



*Story*; and Narcissa in *Roderick Random*. Such a device enables the authors to create a plausibly vulnerable young woman whose unguided ways of dealing with the world (successfully or not) will be entertaining and instructive to the reader.

The overall impression of Opie's first novel is one of a tight structure, largely thanks to a minimising of the number of characters and of sparse description of setting. The pace of *The Dangers of Coquetry* is brisk. It proceeds ineluctably and economically to a foreseeable climax which is wholly logical in terms of the characters and the social conventions in which they exist. Short chapters, typically five or six pages only, permit a step-by-step unfolding of the plot, which in turn enables the reader to build up a titillating sense of prescience. The final action unites all the characters in a resolution which is effective and, in the best sense of the term, theatrical.

Despite all this, *The Dangers of Coquetry* received poor reviews. Although Susannah Taylor thought well of it and Prince Hoare once thought of dramatising it, the work received little attention.<sup>95</sup> *The Critical Review* gave it a brief but damning notice: 'The moral to be drawn from this work is so good, that we are blind to the dulness, the insipidity, and improbability of the narrative.'<sup>96</sup>

Amelia Opie at this time had not yet met Mary Wollstonecraft, although she was to do this within the next four years. The 1790s, when she was to spend much time in smart and radical circles in

<sup>95</sup> MacGregor, p.13.

<sup>96</sup> *The Critical Review*, 70 (1790), p.339.

London, first as a visitor and then from 1796 as a resident, was to be when she received her political education.



## CHAPTER 2

## The Young Radical, 1794 – 1798

**D**espite radical enthusiasm for the events in France, mainstream reaction in England towards the French Revolution at the time was either hostile or noncommittal.<sup>1</sup> Even in the heady days of the Mirabeau period, October 1789 – April 1791, according to Burke, ‘not one in a hundred’ of the English supported it, although Burke could hardly be seen as a disinterested commentator.<sup>2</sup> However, his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) articulated the reactions of conservative opinion in England at the time. These reactions did not go unanswered: Rous, Thelwall, Capel Lofft, Wollstonecraft, Priestley and others engaged vigorously with his argument.<sup>3</sup> John Barrell points out that his opponents criticised ‘the passionate quality of the imagination displayed in the *Reflections*, [which] came to be treated as a symbol of intellectual and political immaturity.’<sup>4</sup> At a time when, as Hobsbawm notes, ‘virtually every person of education, talent and enlightenment sympathized with the

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<sup>1</sup> See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1962), esp. p.79.

<sup>2</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* ed. Leslie Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.79.

<sup>3</sup> See John Barrell, *Imagining the King's Death* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), esp. pp. 8 – 20.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p.11.

Revolution, at all events until the Jacobin dictatorship, and often for very much longer', it is unsurprising that Burke's imaginings were so frequently challenged.<sup>5</sup>

The British government took action against such English radicals as Tom Paine, whose *Rights of Man*, published in March 1791, presented the radical and democratic ideals of the Revolution. One of these actions was the sponsorship by the government of the publication of 22,000 copies of a pamphlet lampooning Paine and castigating him as a traitor.<sup>6</sup> Following the execution of Louis XVI on 21 January 1793 and the declaration of war on Britain, the 'hereditary enemy', by the Revolutionary Government less than a month later, it became very difficult for English radicals to express any sympathy for the French Revolution or the democratic ideals they believed it embodied.<sup>7</sup>

Many Dissenters, however, adhered to the republican cause, since it promised the best hope for the relief of several of the disabilities, such as the denial of university education, which operated against them. Paine's *Rights of Man* set down the principle of religious tolerance which had become embodied in revolutionary America just as it had in revolutionary France. Wharam points out how 'religious freedom had been achieved in Catholic, despotic France, whilst, a century after the Glorious Revolution [of 1688], many English

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<sup>5</sup> Hobsbawm, p.78.

<sup>6</sup> John Keane, *Tom Paine: a Political Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 1995), p.335.

<sup>7</sup> Hobsbawm, p.79.

protestants were still disabled.’<sup>8</sup> Cone writes of the English radicals as sharing ‘a state of mind, a cluster of indignant sensibilities, a faith in reason, a vision of the future’, but cites the radical Thelwall’s comment that there were ‘many different opinions ... as to the extent of change that was needed’.<sup>9</sup>

Burke’s definition of Jacobinism as ‘the revolt of the enterprising talents against property’ is highly interesting.<sup>10</sup> Evidently he grasped that the ‘speculators in public funds, bureaucrats [and] technicians’ who comprised central elements of radicalism in both Britain and France were what we should call nascent forces of capital and capitalism. Their interests and ambitions were often pitted against those of the landowning aristocracy: a collision of finance and manufacturing on one hand with land-rent and agriculture on the other, leading to the eventual triumph of, as Hobsbawm puts it, ‘*capitalist* industry [and] *middle-class* or “*bourgeois*” liberal society’.<sup>11</sup>

It was the very disabilities imposed by the establishment hegemony on those who did not or could not conform – the ancient proscription against Jews owning land, for example, as well as the disabilities applied to Dissenters and Roman Catholics - that

worked to generate wealth and influence by other means. By 1811, these non-establishment economies would be producing

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<sup>8</sup> Wharam, p.16.

<sup>9</sup> Carl B. Cone, *The English Jacobins: Reformers in Late Eighteenth-Century England* (New York: Scribner, 1968).

<sup>10</sup> Burke, p.17.

<sup>11</sup> Hobsbawm, p.1.

twice the wealth as that generated by property ownership and agriculture.<sup>12</sup>

There was consternation among Norwich liberals in 1794 when the standing Member of Parliament, William Windham, became more reactionary and cultivated the friendship of Burke. Windham subsequently crossed the floor to accept the post of Secretary of War in Pitt's cabinet.<sup>13</sup> In view of the increasingly intolerant regime of the government, Norwich radicals regarded the struggle as crucial. Their aim was to unseat him in favour of Bartlett Gurney, but they were unsuccessful. However, according to a letter from Sarah Scott to her sister Elizabeth Montagu dated 15 July, 1794, a 'most curious incident' occurred in the election campaign:

a young woman of uncommon talents of about 25 years of age made a long speech in the Town Hall to about 1500 of the Jacobins assembled against Mr. Wyndham (*sic*), and two daughters of a late Doctor of Divinity stood one on each side of her to encourage her in her proceeding.<sup>14</sup>

In her Introduction to a recent edition of Anna Plumptre's *Something New; or Adventures at Campbell House*, Deborah McLeod claims that 'MacGregor identifies the "young woman" as Amelia Opie and the "two daughters" as Anne and Annabella Plumptre'.<sup>15</sup> She gives no page references, and I have been unable to find any trace of this anecdote in MacGregor. It is not mentioned in Brightwell nor in either

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<sup>12</sup> E. Halévy, *England in 1815* (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1924), p.203.

<sup>13</sup> *Norfolk Chronicle*, 12 July 1794, p.2.

<sup>14</sup> Cited in John Busse, *Mrs Montagu, 'Queen of the Blues'* ed. R Blunt (London: Constable, 1932), p.303.

<sup>15</sup> Anna Plumptre, *Something New; or Adventures at Campbell House*, ed. Deborah McLeod (Peterborough, Canada: Broadview, 1988), pp.ix-x.

of the two local papers, the *Norfolk Chronicle* and the *Norwich Mercury*, during the time of the election campaign. However, it seems very likely that the young woman speaker was in fact Amelia Opie. If so, the incident reveals her political commitment. From what is known of her outgoing, even dogmatic nature, it seems not outside her character to make such a public speech.

In May of that same year, a number of radicals were arrested on charges of sedition, including Thomas Hardy, the founder of the London Corresponding Society, John Horne Tooke, John Thelwall and Thomas Holcroft. These arrests followed a round of arrests of booksellers and the trial *in absentia* of Thomas Paine, who had hurriedly left for France in 1792.<sup>16</sup> The trials which began in October 1794 at the Old Bailey became the focal point of the struggle against Pitt's reactionary regime. The trial of Thomas Hardy, the first prisoner to be brought before Lord Chief Justice Sir James Eyre, lasted eight days before he was acquitted, amongst scenes of joy.<sup>17</sup> Twelve days later, the trial of Horne Tooke began, also under Eyre, and five days later he, too, was acquitted, amidst similar scenes of jubilation. It is clear from Barrell that much of the credit for his acquittal belonged to his counsel, the Hon. Thomas Irvine.<sup>18</sup> Medals and tokens were struck commemorating this victory for radicalism and several of these depict

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<sup>16</sup> Keane, 344 and ff.

<sup>17</sup> Barrell, p.364.

<sup>18</sup> See Barrell, esp. p.391.

Irvine.<sup>19</sup>

Amelia Opie had long been interested by jurisprudence, and would remain so all her life, as her letters confirm. Brightwell quotes from her journals of her enthusiastic childhood attendances at the Assize Court in Norwich.<sup>20</sup> Her father had contact with Thomas Holcroft through the Corresponding Society, and there was accommodation for her at the house of Samuel Boddington, the non-conformist minister, in Southgate. She was thus able to attend the Treason Trials. Barrell records her overhearing Thomas Erskine, a prominent barrister and later an MP, replying to a remark by Eyre in a form of words which implied a challenge to a duel.<sup>21</sup> Duelling at that time was an anachronistic practice which was not actually illegal but which was unpopular with radicals.<sup>22</sup> In *Adeline Mowbray* (1805), Opie's philosopher Glenmurray fulminated against the practice, as did William Godwin in real life.<sup>23</sup> It was, however, in Clark's words, 'proof of the survival and power of the aristocratic ideal as a code separate from, and ultimately superior to, the injunctions of law and religion.'<sup>24</sup> According to Barrell, Opie subsequently raised this with

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., pp.406 – 407.

<sup>20</sup> Brightwell, pp.23-27.

<sup>21</sup> Barrell, p.387.

<sup>22</sup> See J. C. D. Clark, *English Society 1688-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.109.

<sup>23</sup> See Opie, *Adeline Mowbray*, pp.29-30. Also Godwin, pp.94-96.

<sup>24</sup> Clark, p.109.



Erskine in 1813, who confirmed that he had so challenged Eyre.<sup>25</sup> The incident, highly unprofessional and watered down by the press, is indicative of the passion the trial generated.

It is indicative of the unease felt by Dissenters at the outcome that Dr Alderson burnt all Opie's letters to him of the trial. However, a letter to her confidante Susannah Taylor survives, in which her comments indicate the gravity with which many Dissenters regarded the verdict and its possible consequences:

I hope we are at all events resolved to emigrate if the event of the trial be fatal. [We would] carry a little society along with us, in which we could be happy should Philadelphia disappoint our expectations.<sup>26</sup>

The Aldersons were not the only people to consider emigration. Jonathan Wordsworth notes that this was 'precisely the moment when Coleridge and Southey [were] planning a commune on the banks of the Susquehanna', continuing:

Priestley had emigrated earlier in the year; had Holcroft, Hardy, Thelwall and other leading radicals indicted for treason, been convicted ... England would not have been a place in which French sympathisers could continue to live.<sup>27</sup>

Opie's account of her experiences at the trial reveals her excitement at being a witness to a crucial legal event:

I heard that at these approaching trials, to which I hoped to gain admission, I should not only hear the first

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<sup>25</sup> Barrell, p.387.

<sup>26</sup> Opie to Susannah Taylor, October 1794; Huntington OP52.

<sup>27</sup> Amelia Opie, *Adeline Mowbray*, Jonathan Wordsworth, ed. (Poole: Woodstock, 1995), introduction, unpaginated.

pleaders at the bar, but behold, and probably hear examined, the first magnates of the land; and on the event depended ... interests of a public nature, and most nearly affecting the safety and prosperity of the nation: aye, and much personally interesting to myself, as I knew, in the secret of my heart, that my own prospect for life might probably be changed and darkened by the result.<sup>28</sup>

While staying with the Boddingtons at the time of the Treason Trials, Opie took the opportunity to visit William Godwin in nearby Somers Town a few days before they began. Godwin was a friend of her father, a critic of her play and the author of *Political Justice* (1793), which she had read. Also, she had met him a few months previously when he visited her father in Norwich. Her expectations at that time had been to find 'a man after his own heart', but, as she later told Wollstonecraft, she was disappointed to find him 'a man after the present state of things.'<sup>29</sup>

Both MacGregor and Julia Kavanagh quote her description of meeting again one of the most important radical figures of the day, contained in a letter to Mrs Taylor, the original of which was in the now-missing Carr Mss.:

Mr. J. Boddington and I set off for town yesterday by way of Islington, that we might pay our first visit to Godwin. ... We arrived at about one o'clock at the philosopher's house, whom we found with his hair *bien poudré*, and in a pair of new, sharp-toed, red morocco slippers, not to mention his green coat and crimson under-waistcoat. He received me very kindly but wondered what I should think of being out of London; - could I be either amused or instructed at Southgate? How did I pass my time? What were my pursuits? and a great deal more, which frightened my protector, and

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<sup>28</sup> Brightwell, pp.49-50.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.41.

tired me, till at last I told him I had not yet outlived my affections and that they bound me to the family at Southgate. ... Rarely did we agree, and little did he gain on me by his mode of attack, but he seemed alarmed lest he should have offended me, and apologised several times for the harshness of his expressions.<sup>30</sup>

It would appear from her letter that she felt she had made a considerable impression on Godwin. A later letter to Mrs Taylor, during a further visit to the Boddington's, describes how, as he prepared to conclude his visit 'He wished to salute me, but his courage failed him'.<sup>31</sup> He resolved his dilemma by pocketing her slipper as a keepsake. 'You have no idea', continued Opie, 'how gallant he has become'.

Opie began to visit London more frequently, discovering what she described as a 'wilderness of pleasure'.<sup>32</sup> She did not come entirely out of the blue: Henry Crabb Robinson recalls that 'There came to visit Miss Buck a young lady from Norwich who had already acquired a great provincial celebrity, Amelia Alderson.'<sup>33</sup> If Crabb Robinson intended a literary 'celebrity', this must have been from *The Dangers of Coquetry*, her only published work, and anonymous at that, until her contributions to *The Cabinet* appeared, also anonymously, in 1795. He may, of course, have intended radical celebrity, which might lend more credence to the incident at the election meeting. Alternatively, in view of the oxymoronic nature of 'provincial celebrity', he may have

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<sup>30</sup> MacGregor, pp.20-21.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.22.

intended irony.

*The Cabinet*, the journal of the Tusculaneum Society of Norwich, was published in three volumes in that city during 1795. William Taylor, Jnr., generally regarded as being the editor and driving force behind the publication, was then twenty-nine and Opie twenty-five.<sup>34</sup> A slip of paper survives recording the names of the 'Members of the Tusculan School' present at a meeting which took place on 18th October 1793, although Opie's name is not amongst them.<sup>35</sup>

The Tusculans published anonymously, most contributors signing their work with a single letter, an asterisk or other printer's device. In Opie's case, the letter she used was 'N', and this can be verified by cross-checking seven of the poems in *The Cabinet* which also appear either in *Poems* (1802) or *The Warrior's Return and Other Poems* (1808). Regarding the identity of the contributors to *The Cabinet*, Jewson makes reference to 'a manuscript key to some of the codes'.<sup>36</sup> Walter Graham presents further evidence of authorship based on the existence of a

'marked copy' in the Library of the University of Michigan, U.S.A. - a copy which, from the internal evidence, appears to have been once the property of Richard or Arthur Taylor - seems to settle beyond a reasonable doubt the identity of the writers.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> H. Crabb Robinson, *Books and their Writers*, ed. Edith J Morley (London: Dent, 1938), p.2.

<sup>34</sup> Jewson, p.59.

<sup>35</sup> Norfolk Record Office, Norwich; 143924.

<sup>36</sup> Jewson, p.60.

<sup>37</sup> Walter Graham, 'The Authorship of the Norwich *Cabinet*, 1794-1795', *Notes and*

Graham's article suggested that the copy in the University of Michigan Library had been marked to show the identities of the contributors. Richard and Arthur Taylor were brothers of William, the editor of *The Cabinet*. On examination, the copy in question shows clear notes under a heading 'Signatures in the Cabinet' which list the contributor and their signs on the flyleaf before the title page of Volume One.<sup>38</sup> This would appear to confirm the attributions beyond reasonable doubt, despite the list being compiled after May 1798, the date of Amelia Alderson's marriage to John Opie, as the entry for her reads 'Amelia Alderson, now Mrs. Opie'.<sup>39</sup> The Tusculaneum Society, despite describing itself as a 'Society of Gentlemen', nevertheless seems to have accepted a considerable amount of work from Amelia Opie and Annabella Plumptre ('A.B.'), although theirs are the only women's names that appear on the list in the University of Michigan copy. The male contributors are identified as: John Taylor ('H.D.'), T.S. Norgate (a small hand), Charles Marsh ('X'), William Enfield ('Homo', 'M'), William Youngman ('Alcanor'), John Stewart Taylor ('Clio'), John Pitchford ('Y'), Edward Rigby ('W'), H. Gardiner ('\*\*\*'), the Rev. T. Drummond ('G.'), William Dalrymple ('ooo' or 'xx'), Henry Crabb Robinson ('H.C.R.') and William Taylor, who used no mark.<sup>40</sup>

The close resemblance of the Tusculaneum Society to the Speculative

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*Queries*, 162 (1932), 294-295.

<sup>38</sup> *The Cabinet*, Special Collections Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

Society identified by Chandler will be seen from comparing the names of the respective members.<sup>41</sup> It seems clear that these individuals formed the core of Dissenting radicalism in Norwich at the time.

An account in Frazer's *The Golden Bough* records Tusculum as being one of the towns to which the sacred grove of Diana at Nemi was dedicated by Egerius Baebius, the Latin dictator, on behalf of the peoples of those towns.<sup>42</sup> The grove is associated with Hippolytus, described by Frazer as 'young, virginal and fair' and the companion of Artemis in the sylvan setting. According to legend Hippolytus was killed by his father Theseus, but later revived and taken by Artemis into her grove. The name is therefore an apt one for a predominantly male group of young radical intellectuals who, in an emphatically patriarchal society, regarded themselves as alienated from their Government, if not their actual fathers.

The volumes of *The Cabinet* have a dedicatory verse on the fly, and the first volume has a Preface. The dedicatory verse, attributed to James Thomson (1700-1748), the sentimental nature poet, reads:

... The century claims our active aid;  
Then let us roam, and where we find a spark  
Of public virtue, blow it into flame.

The metre, subject-matter and rhetorical nature of these lines is certainly reminiscent of Thomson's ode 'Liberty' (pub.1750).<sup>43</sup> This

<sup>41</sup> Chandler, p.5.

<sup>42</sup> Sir James Frazer, *The Golden Bough* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 2 vols., 1, p.6.

<sup>43</sup> James Thomson, *Works* (London: A. Millar, 1750), 4 vols., 2, unpaginated.

work presents a conception of Ancient Greece as being the perfect civilisation, blending rational knowledge and the imagination to produce high Art.

Further indication of the Tusculan's radical zeal is found in the Preface, identified by his mark as the work of Thomas Norgate (1772-1859), which begins, not immodestly:

No work in the English language, perhaps, ever appeared to the world, under circumstances more inauspicious and depressing than THE CABINET. Its publication was announced at a time, when the public mind seduced by the base artifices of a designing and profligate administration, rejected with a furious disdain, every attempt at rational reform.<sup>44</sup>

Norgate's discourse continues with further lofty phrases, including a reference to local obstacles to publication, namely 'the wretched effects of misrepresentation, prejudice and party spirit' which have now been overcome. It continues:

One point only the Editors beg leave to insist on, viz. the purity of the intentions that gave birth to the undertaking. Tremblingly alive to the horrors of a ministerial despotism, unparalleled in the history of this country since the revolution [of 1688], they entered on a path beset with many dangers, in the course of which they were to meet with much and serious difficulty.

The French Revolution is mentioned, which event 'though sullied by many a foul deed, still seemed to promise the sublime spectacle of a great and powerful nation governing itself on the principles of *liberty* and *equality*'. Having established their radical, even revolutionary, ideals, the Editors conclude three pages later with a

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<sup>44</sup> *The Cabinet*, 1, p.i and ff. Subsequent quotations are from this edition, and page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

dedication 'to that public, whose powerful arm has so successfully defended it against the attacks of an intolerant and malignant faction'. This is dated 17 January 1795.

MacGregor lists a total of fifteen poems in *The Cabinet* which she feels can be attributed to Amelia Opie.<sup>45</sup> Although MacGregor's research is usually scrupulous, she misses out the poem 'Laura', which appeared in volume three of *The Cabinet*, pp.17-21, with the monogram 'N', and re-printed in Opie's first collection of verse published in 1802, also the poem 'Caroline to Henry' in volume three. This latter poem is not credited, but it also appears in the 1802 anthology. The definitive number is therefore seventeen poems.

In addition, however, a short story appeared in *The Cabinet* which can be attributed to Amelia Opie by the device of the letter 'N', and this attribution is confirmed by Graham.<sup>46</sup> 'The Nun' appeared in volume two (pp.137 - 143). While it may be seen as little more than a device to present a vindication of the later stages of the French Revolution at a time when sympathy for the revolutionary cause was rapidly ebbing in England, it does contain certain ingredients which are to become characteristic of Opie's later prose writing: pathos, a subtly contrived situation, and the device of an interlocutor. The tale is told in the first person by an Englishman staying in Bruges, who is riding out to escape the Revolutionary Army as it advances towards that city. The ingenuous, itinerant, sentimental male narrator, reminiscent at

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<sup>45</sup> MacGregor, p.12 *fn.*

<sup>46</sup> Graham, p.294.



once of Sterne's Yorick, passes a group of nuns also fleeing from Bruges and 'sincerely pitying their situation, [he] pulled off [his] hat respectfully as [he] passed them, without alarming their delicacy by the gaze of curiosity'.<sup>47</sup>

Further along the road from Bruges he meets another nun sitting on the verge. She asks him the whereabouts of her sisters, and he feels that 'I had been in the presence of the most haughty prince on earth' in terms of the 'awe and embarrassment' he experiences answering 'this forlorn and friendless female' (p.138). Yorick's persona suggests itself once more, particularly his interview with the *fille de chambre*.<sup>48</sup> The nun informs Opie's traveller of her paradoxical situation: that she is French, and although of noble birth, a fervent Revolutionary because she has seen how

The tyranny of the aristocracy and courts is hateful in the sight of God: for the groans of millions, victims to their power, rise up against them, and ... the blood that is now shed will purchase the happiness of the thousands yet unborn. (p.139)

There are gender implications in her narrative. First, she is the victim of her father's determination to pass his wealth to his son, hence her present position as a nun. Second, somewhere in the approaching Revolutionary Army is her male lover, from whom she must flee, since her vows may not be broken. But her flight is not without an internal struggle: she tells the narrator,

<sup>47</sup> Amelia Opie, 'The Nun' in *The Cabinet*, vol. 2, p.138. Subsequent references to this tale are included parenthetically in the text.

<sup>48</sup> See Lawrence Sterne, *A Sentimental Journey Through France and Italy* (London: Penguin, 1986), p.90 and ff.

There were moments, when hurried away by the power of awakened passion, I felt resolute from despair, and almost determined to brave the censure of the world, and the power of my superior, and stay to behold him once again, to hail with him the triumph of liberty, and then bid him farewell for ever. (p.142)

In such a short story, written with political as well as aesthetic goals, Amelia Opie has constructed a paradox of subtle complexity and one which strongly draws on the difficult path a young woman must tread, in ways that are reminiscent of *The Dangers of Coquetry*: the nun is caught between her virtuous vows to the order and her amorous desires for her lover, a tension Opie will revisit in her gothic tale 'Love, Mystery and Superstition' (1820). However, the order is serving the corrupt instructions of a tyrannical father, a member of the *régime* she execrates, and the lover is a soldier of the forces of liberty. She owes duty to the corrupt patriarch, who opposes the course of young love and the liberation that goes with it. The pathos of this young woman's plight strongly affects the sentimental narrator, who concludes the tale with the single line, 'I know not how I got to Ostend!'

This concluding paragraph, however, is preceded by the political moral of the tale, which has an increased potency, having affected the reader through the device of the sentimental narrator. It reads:

Farewell, sir! Blessings attend you! and should you ever be tempted to execrate the French revolution on account of the partial misery which it has occasioned, think on the victim of that government which it has destroyed, whose sorrows you yourself have witnessed, and forgive it for the sake of SISTER ANGELINA.

While this statement in itself legitimises the French Revolution on the Rousseauian grounds of the greater good despite the 'partial misery',<sup>49</sup> it also seems clear that the nun's divided loyalties and the paradoxical relationship she has with them to some degree reflected a conflict present in Amelia Opie's own mind at this time. She evidently felt the probability of a popular uprising in England and other European countries to be a strong one, which, given the radical nature of the society in which she moved in both Norwich and London, is perhaps understandable. She also realised that in this eventuality, the forces of reaction were well-prepared, as we have seen from the report of the mobilisation of the Yeomanry, and that much blood would be shed.<sup>50</sup> In a letter to Mrs. Taylor, she writes, with the customary love of florid metaphor to signal a matter of high importance:

I believe an hour to be approaching when *salut et fraternité* will be the watchwords for civil slaughter throughout Europe ... the meridian glory of the sun of Liberty, in France, will light us to courting the past dangers and horrors of the Republic in hopes of obtaining her present power and greatness.<sup>51</sup>

Clearly perceiving such an event to be 'an awful time', she expresses a wish to 'meet it with fortitude', continuing:

But I shrink, and shrink *only*, from the idea of ties dear to my heart which it will forever break; of the friendships I must forego; of the dangers of those I love; and of friends equally dear to me, meeting in the

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<sup>49</sup> See J.-J. Rousseau, 'The Social Contract' in D. A. Cress (ed.) *Jean-Jacques Rousseau: The Basic Political Writings* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), pp. 214 & ff.

<sup>50</sup> Matchett, ed., unpaginated.

<sup>51</sup> Brightwell, p.58.

field of strife opposed in mortal combat.

The inference that, shielded by her sex, Opie herself does not expect to take part in any ‘mortal combat’ was not an assumption shared by many of the women Revolutionists in France.<sup>52</sup> For all the rhetoric, we glimpse a romanticised view of any armed struggle, in keeping with gender expectations that existed in England until the twentieth century.

Jewson writes that ‘After publishing for twelve months it was judged wise to discontinue *The Cabinet*.’<sup>53</sup> His comment refers to the political tensions of the time and the consequent need for prudence felt by many radicals. The need to distance themselves from the publication is suggested not only by the anonymity of the contributions but also by Opie’s later comment: ‘What a pity *The Cabinet* is dangerous. I should have enjoyed it else so much.’<sup>54</sup> The ironic phrase ‘should have’ suggests that she was merely a potential reader rather than an actual contributor, or alternatively that she read it but could not enjoy it because of its political stance. Either way, her comment is evidence of the skill with which she manipulated not only her language but also her public persona. Significantly for her construction of Opie as a figure of respectability, Brightwell makes no direct mention of *The Cabinet*, merely quoting the above in a longer letter without comment.

It will be seen from the foregoing tale and letter and some of

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<sup>52</sup> See Dominique Godineau, *The Women of Paris and their French Revolution* (London: University of California, 1998), esp. pp. 134 and ff.

<sup>53</sup> C.B. Jewson, p.60.

<sup>54</sup> Opie to Susannah Taylor; 1794: Huntington Library.

the poems in *The Cabinet* that Amelia Opie was, at this time, a committed radical who could effectively use her narrative and poetic skills to communicate a libertarian, democratic, pacifist political message at a time when the agents of repression in Britain were at their most active, and British popular sentiment was aligned with the British military in reacting to the *Grand Armée* of Revolutionary France.

While the educated classes debated the success or otherwise of the Revolution in France, the majority of the population experienced great hardship. Riots and disturbances continued to break out during the early nineties as they had done since 1740.<sup>55</sup> Most of these were caused by increases in the price of food. The areas affected in 1792 were Nottingham, Leicester, Norwich and Sheffield. In 1793, towns in Cornwall were visited by miners 'in search of concealed corn'.<sup>56</sup> In the same year, on September 30, a number of people were killed by the military when protesting a toll imposed on a bridge in Bristol. During 1794, as well as unrest in Newcastle, 'a continual ferment existed in the West Riding of Yorkshire. In order to cope with any possible disorder, a defence corps was organised at Leeds, Halifax, Bradford and York.'<sup>57</sup> 1795 is regarded by Wearmouth as 'the most turbulent during the last twenty years of the century'.<sup>58</sup> Evidence of the desperation for food is seen in the incident at Knottingley, when a

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<sup>55</sup> See Robert Wearmouth, *Methodism and the Common People of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Epworth Press, 1945), pp.19 – 50.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, p.45.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p.46.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p.47.

vessel loaded with corn was detained by protesters and not released until the yeomanry appeared. At the corn mills in Halifax a demonstration by women and children was dispersed by the cavalry of the Yorkshire Volunteers.<sup>59</sup> This was class war, but it did not appear to connect with the radical concerns of English people of the middle rank. Even when the first Corn Law was introduced in 1804, it was not vigorously opposed by the enfranchised classes. Discussing the relative weakness of English Jacobinism at this time, Hobsbawm notes that ‘the very fleet at Spithead, which mutinied at a crucial stage of the war [1797], clamoured to be allowed to sail against the French once their demands had been met.’<sup>60</sup> As Wearmouth points out, the poor were not unpatriotic: they were in distress.<sup>61</sup>

By late 1795 it was appropriate for Opie to move closer to the vortex of political thought in London, where she subsequently lived for long periods, alternating with spells in Norwich. Opie quickly became part of a coterie comprised of William Godwin, Elizabeth Inchbald, Thomas Holcroft and herself. Her letters at that time record her intellectual excitement: that of 28 August 1795 to Godwin speaks of the ‘new ideas’ she has gained from him.<sup>62</sup> This letter is clearly written to impress, for its language is intellectual by comparison with her usual informal tones, and in considerable contrast to one dated 11

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Hobsbawm, p.79.

<sup>61</sup> Wearmouth, p.51.

<sup>62</sup> Opie to Godwin, 28/8/95; Bodleian Library, B.Dep. 6/210.6.

November 1796, in which she remonstrates with him for calling her a 'Coquette' and 'Bitch'.<sup>63</sup> 'By 1796', writes MacGregor, 'the friendship between the four occasioned considerable general interest.'<sup>64</sup> Both MacGregor and Kavanagh quote Opie's letter of this period, now lost, which appears in Brightwell. The letter is undated, which was not uncommon for Opie. William St Clair, however, puts it at June 1795, which appears to be accurate.<sup>65</sup> Opie writes:

Mrs Inchbald says the report of the world is, that Mr Holcroft is in love with her, *she* with Mr Godwin, Mr Godwin with *me*, and I in love with Mr. Holcroft! A pretty story indeed! This report Godwin brings to me, and he says Mrs I. always tells him that when she praises him, I praise Holcroft. This is not fair in Mrs I. She appears to me to be jealous of G.'s attention to me, so she makes him believe that I prefer H. to him. She often says to me, 'Now that you are come, Mr. Godwin does not come near me.' Is this not very womanish?<sup>66</sup>

Elizabeth Inchbald is of significance at this time of Amelia Opie's political education, for there are two similarities between the two women. The first is their regional connection, and the second is in the way that neither woman was as doctrinaire as Godwin and Holcroft might have wished. Writing of Inchbald, Gary Kelly comments that:

Mrs Inchbald ... enjoyed a range of social connections. ... she always had more fashionable acquaintance than she needed, and more than some of her more rigid friends, such as Holcroft and Godwin, thought good for her. But owing to her East Anglian origins she also had extensive connections amongst that astonishing

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> MacGregor, p.20.

<sup>65</sup> William St. Clair, *The Godwins and the Shelleys* (London: Faber, 1989), p.152.

<sup>66</sup> Brightwell, p.59.

collection of Dissenting intelligentsia centred in Norwich, and active in every branch of religion, industry and the arts.<sup>67</sup>

William Godwin was clearly a man who had the power to attract women, and construct relationships with them. In discussing him, Kelly notes:

there was always something androgynous about his cast of mind, as he himself admitted. .... There can be no other explanation for Godwin's attractiveness to such a wide range of female characters as Elizabeth Inchbald, Amelia Alderson, Mary Robinson, Mary Hays and Mary Wollstonecraft. For these women, Godwin was more than a Mentor or father-figure, more, one might say, than a mere man. The letters and the novels of these women, if read with care and candour, witness their recognition of Godwin's candid and catalyzing personality.<sup>68</sup>

The tenor of the group was unquestionably literary. Jonathan Wordsworth points out that 'Elizabeth Inchbald asked [Godwin] to look over her *Simple Story* (1791), and in turn read the proofs of *Caleb Williams* (1794)'.<sup>69</sup> Opie's letters indicate that she had dramatised his story 'The Sorcerer', to the sight of which he responded favourably. She also mentions a new play written in the summer of 1796, which she sends to him for reading on 1 November 1796, and discusses in subsequent letters.<sup>70</sup>

Kelly discusses Godwin's interest in Inchbald, quoting from

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<sup>67</sup> Gary Kelly, *The English Jacobin Novel 1780-1805* (Oxford: OUP, 1976), p.5.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p.266.

<sup>69</sup> Wordsworth, ed., unpaginated.

<sup>70</sup> Amelia Alderson to William Godwin, 1 April 1796; undated (before 1 November 1796); 1 November 1796; 13 November 1796 and 18 November 1796: Bodleian, B.Dep 6/210.



Godwin's journal entry for 16 March 1793: 'Call on Inchbald, talk of marriage.'<sup>71</sup> Of Mary Hays, Wordsworth writes that she 'wrote out of the blue to borrow a copy of *Political Justice*, and, although she was never a favourite, Godwin's letters form a substantial part of her autobiographical *Emma Courtney* (1796).'<sup>72</sup> Hays, who met Amelia Opie at this time, expressed her opinion of her in a letter to Godwin dated 6 June 1796: 'Assured, fearless and self-satisfied, Miss A must long since have forgotten to blush or hesitate.'<sup>73</sup> Opie, on the other hand, expressed pleasure in reading Hays' *Emma Courtney*, both to Wollstonecraft and to Godwin.<sup>74</sup> Unflattering as Hays' comment may be, it certainly reveals Opie's youthful worldliness at that time. The assertive behaviour implied in Hays' sketch of her indicates how, as a radical, she felt able to transgress the limits of female behaviour deemed appropriate by polite society and expressed in the agons of Opie's *The Dangers of Coquetry*.<sup>75</sup>

In several of the letters referred to above, Opie expresses her concern and that of her father for the dilettante poet Robert Merry (1755-1798), who had fled abroad to escape his creditors. On 10 July 1796 William Godwin journeyed to Norwich to approach Dr Alderson

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<sup>71</sup> Kelly, p.13.

<sup>72</sup> Wordsworth, ed., unpaginated.

<sup>73</sup> Mary Hays to William Godwin, 6 June 1796; Pforzheimer Collection, New York Public Library.

<sup>74</sup> Amelia Opie to Mrs Imlay, 17 December 1796 and to William Godwin, 22 December 1796; Bodleian, B.Dep 6/210.

<sup>75</sup> Patricia Howell Michaelson *Speaking Volumes: Women, Reading and Speech in Austen and Her Time* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 2001), p.13 and ff.

for funds to relieve Merry's indebtedness. His diary entry for that day read simply 'Propose to Alderson.' This cryptic entry has led certain biographers to assume that the proposal was one of marriage to Amelia Alderson. William St Clair, Godwin's most recent biographer, explains the misconception:

On 10 July ... Godwin had noted in his journal 'Propose to Alderson', as a result of which earlier biographers of Godwin and Wollstonecraft have believed, with insufficient surprise, that he made the journey to Norwich in order to propose marriage to Amelia Alderson. In fact, Godwin's proposal was addressed to her father – Amelia was not in Norwich at the time – and concerned a plan to buy off the creditors of [the poet] Robery Merry ... who had been arrested for debt two days before and who now wanted to emigrate to the United States.<sup>76</sup>

St. Clair's source is Kegan Paul, where it is possible to read Godwin's own words. Godwin had first met Merry in 1792 when living in Somers Town, and the two men became friends.<sup>77</sup> In a review of the year 1796, Godwin states:

In the course of this summer, I paid a second visit to Norfolk, in the company of Merry, and had the happiness, by my interference and importuning with my friends, to relieve this admirable man from a debt of £200, for which he was arrested while I was under his roof, and would otherwise have been thrown in jail.<sup>78</sup>

As a further corroboration, St. Clair also mentions in a footnote: 'Amelia Alderson was in London at the time of the proposal, as is clear from a reference in the *Journals* to Godwin calling on

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<sup>76</sup> W. St. Clair, p.164.

<sup>77</sup> P. Marshall, *William Godwin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984), p.145.

<sup>78</sup> H. Kegan Paul, *William Godwin: His Friends and Contemporaries* (London: Henry King, 1876), 2 vols., 1, p.164.

Amelia Alderson on his return.<sup>79</sup> According to Marshall, Dr Alderson rejected Godwin's proposal.<sup>80</sup> This was probably because Merry had a reputation as an idle profligate who had already spent his own fortune in Florence, although he was revered by artistic liberals in London.<sup>81</sup>

The proposal incident is of significance because a number of critics who thought that Godwin was proposing marriage to Amelia Opie used it to explain one of Opie's motives in writing *Adeline Mowbray* (1805) as attacking Mary Wollstonecraft with, as Claire Tomalin put it in her biography of Wollstonecraft, 'distinctly malicious enthusiasm'.<sup>82</sup>

Nothing could be further from the truth, for Amelia Opie was anxious to meet the author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. MacGregor writes, basing her comments on Kegan Paul: 'The two met in 1796 and became fast friends. ... Amelia was deeply impressed. Two things only, she said, had fulfilled her expectations - the Lake Country and Mary Wollstonecraft.'<sup>83</sup> Kegan Paul, reading from Godwin's Journal, reports that Opie's actual words were 'Mrs. Imlay and the Cumberland Lakes,' but the impact of the comparison is just as

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<sup>79</sup> St. Clair, p.536.

<sup>80</sup> Marshall, p.182.

<sup>81</sup> *Dictionary of National Biography* ed. by S Lee (London: Smith, Elder, 1897), 13, 295.

<sup>82</sup> Claire Tomalin, *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft* (London: Penguin, 1985), p.293. See also Marilyn Butler, *Burke, Paine, Godwin and the Revolution Controversy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p.121; Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1986); Matthew Grenby, 'Woman as She Should Be: Women, Writing and Counter-Revolution in the 1790s' paper delivered April 1996, London Women's Study Group.

<sup>83</sup> MacGregor, p.21.

telling.<sup>84</sup> The original letter, unfortunately, is missing. On 28 August 1796 Opie wrote warmly to Mrs Imlay, as Wollstonecraft then styled herself: 'I derive so much pleasure from thinking of you ... Will you help me account for the strong desire I always feel when with you to say affectionate things to you?'<sup>85</sup> The letter continues by Opie saying that she is reading Wollstonecraft's 'Letters from Norway', meaning, presumably, the just-published *Letters from Scandinavia* (1796).

Opie's gushing affection was not returned by Wollstonecraft, who, older, perhaps more devious and less willing to risk being hurt, negotiated her way into the clique with her eye on Godwin, the philosopher who had inveighed against marriage. Perhaps, like Opie, expecting to find a congruence between the man and his writings, she felt safe with him. On 17 August Godwin and Wollstonecraft became lovers, as seen by his enigmatic diary entry: 'chez moi, toute'.<sup>86</sup> Letters from Opie during November and December of that year indicate a clumsy offer of financial assistance to 'Mrs Imlay' from an anonymous benefactor, Wollstonecraft's indignation at the offer and Opie's rather hurt response.<sup>87</sup> She was also peeved by Godwin's churlish acceptance of a gift of apples, writing to him that 'My gift was meant in simple courtesy, as a mark of attention merely.'<sup>88</sup> It seems as though

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<sup>84</sup> Kegan Paul, 1, p.158.

<sup>85</sup> Amelia Alderson to Mrs Imlay, 28 August 1796; Bodleian, B.Dep. 6/210.

<sup>86</sup> Tomalin, p.258.

<sup>87</sup> Alderson to Godwin, 18 November 1796; Alderson to Mrs Imlay, 18 December 1796; Alderson to Godwin, 22 December 1796; Bodleian, B.Dep. 6/210.

<sup>88</sup> Alderson to Godwin, 22 December 1796; Bodleian, B.Dep. 6/210.

Wollstonecraft was asserting her territory in her new relationship by using her greater maturity to rebuff Opie's ingenuousness and keep her at a distance. Opie's next letter to 'Mrs Godwin', undated but written after March 1797, is polite but cooler in tone and concerns obtaining a seat in her theatre box.<sup>89</sup> While it is important not to over-simplify this three-way relationship, it seems clear that although Opie was offended by Wollstonecraft, she was never malicious towards her .

Godwin and Wollstonecraft did not marry immediately, but set up house together with Godwin keeping separate quarters across the road in which to do his writing. 'We did not marry,' he writes in his *Memoirs of the Author of 'A Vindication of the Rights of Man'*, 'nothing can be so ridiculous upon the face of it, or so contrary to the genuine march of sentiment, as to require the overflowing of the soul to wait upon a ceremony.'<sup>90</sup> Thus it was that, as Jonathan Wordsworth writes, 'Wollstonecraft would be regarded for the next century and a half as a fallen woman'.<sup>91</sup> This cohabitation lasted only six months or so, until Mary Wollstonecraft found herself pregnant, when the pair decided to marry, which they did in March 1797.

The decision obliged friends to note that Wollstonecraft, who styled herself 'Mrs Imlay', did not have to first divorce Gilbert Imlay and they therefore had to come to terms with the fact that Mary Wollstonecraft was an unmarried mother. Elizabeth Inchbald's

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<sup>89</sup> Alderson to Mrs Godwin, undated; Bodleian, B.Dep.C, 507/15.

<sup>90</sup> William Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of 'A Vindication of the Rights of Man'* (London, 1798), p.154.

<sup>91</sup> Wordsworth, ed., unpaginated.

passionate renouncement of their friendship is a matter of record.

After her publicly insulting the couple at the theatre on the nineteenth of April, twenty-one days after the wedding, the letter she sent reads in part: 'With the most sincere sympathy in all you have suffered - with the most perfect forgiveness of all you have said to me, there must nevertheless be an end to our acquaintance *for ever*'.<sup>92</sup> Amelia Opie, who was in Norwich at the time of the wedding, did not so much sever her links with the Godwins as remain in the circles from which they had excluded themselves. Her pragmatism is revealed in a letter to Susannah Taylor in Norwich, written early in 1797 (dated, as was her wont, simply 'Tuesday'), where she is discussing how news of the Godwin-Wollstonecraft marriage, 'that wonder-creating event', was received in London. Writing of the apparent contradiction of the marriage of two philosophers who had each renounced the idea of marriage, she takes a robustly pragmatic view:

Heigho, what charming things would sublime theories be, if one could make one's practice keep up with them; but I am convinced it is impossible, and am resolved to make the best of every-day nature.<sup>93</sup>

Six months later, on 30th August, Mary Wollstonecraft, 'femme Godwin' as she called herself, gave birth, with pain and difficulty. Ten days afterwards she was dead, probably from septicemia. The making-public of his relationship with Wollstonecraft in Godwin's *Memoirs* was to cause a wave of reaction to pass through English

<sup>92</sup> Quoted by Strachey in his Introduction to Elizabeth Inchbald, *A Simple Story* (London: Henry Froude, 1908), pp.xiii – xiv.

<sup>93</sup> Brightwell, p.63. This important letter appears to have been lost.

writing and publishing which lasted well into the nineteenth century. Opie's biographer, for example, writing in 1853 with her own reasons for distancing Opie from Wollstonecraft, refers to Wollstonecraft as 'a strange, incomprehensible woman, whose unhappy existence terminated shortly after this marriage.'<sup>94</sup>

From 1795 until 1798 Amelia Opie was evidently moving in one of London's most sophisticated and radical circles. In addition to the names already cited, we can add Dr Geddes and Anna Laetitia Barbauld;<sup>95</sup> Helen Maria Williams; Charlotte Smith;<sup>96</sup> Prince Hoare;<sup>97</sup> Johnson, the publisher;<sup>98</sup> the *émigrés* the Duc d'Aiguillon and Charles Lameth.<sup>99</sup>

John Opie, whom Amelia was to marry, was a fashionable enigma. For his appearance and behaviour, MacGregor, quoting Southey's description which appears in *Earland*, notes that his speech 'was still half Cornish, his manners free, and there was a certain vulgarity in his appearance.' And yet, she adds: 'Opie, in 1797, was well established in his profession.' He had survived the vagaries of

<sup>94</sup> Brightwell, p.61.

<sup>95</sup> Julia Kavanagh, *English Women of Letters* (London: Hurst & Blackett, 1863) p.247.

<sup>96</sup> Mary K. Tevis, 'Amelia Opie: Exponent and Critic of the Novel of Radical Propaganda' unpublished MA Thesis (Denton, Texas: Texas Women's University, 1941), p.18.

<sup>97</sup> A letter dd. 6 December (no year) from Amelia Opie asks Hoare, a producer of plays and member of the Royal Academy, to read a play ms.; Knox College Archives, Galesburg. Ill.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> MacGregor, p.21.

fashion without losing his head. 'His fellow artists thought well of him. In 1787 he was elected a Royal Academician. Sir Joshua Reynolds had from the beginning given praise and encouragement; Northcote ... considered him a man of genius'.<sup>100</sup> Opie 'had had little schooling [but] had assiduously endeavoured to educate himself. He was widely read in the works of a number of writers, among them Milton and Shakespeare, Pope, Dryden and Johnson.'<sup>101</sup> He is mentioned twice, favourably, in Hazlitt's *Table Talk*.<sup>102</sup> Crabb Robinson, however, like Dr. Alderson, found his manners 'coarse'.<sup>103</sup>

There is no reluctance on the part of any biographer of Amelia Opie, or Opie himself, or even Elizabeth Fry, to discuss the courtship and marriage. Unlike the radicals, he was clearly a man the nineteenth-century biographers favoured. Ada Earland writes of their first meeting in the spring of 1797, in either Norwich or London.<sup>104</sup> MacGregor, working from accounts in both Brightwell and A.M.W. Stirling's *Coke of Norfolk and His Friends*, is clear that the meeting took place in Norwich, but not exactly where.<sup>105</sup> Brightwell mentions that it took place at the house of 'one of her [Opie's] early friends', and the subtext here is that it was not at the Gurneys, who were a wealthy

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid., p.25.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p.24.

<sup>102</sup> William Hazlitt, *Table Talk* (1815) ed. by C. M. Maclean (London: Dent, 1959), p.10 & p.296.

<sup>103</sup> Crabb Robinson, p.8.

<sup>104</sup> Ada Earland, *John Opie and His Circle* (London: Hutchinson, 1911), p.124.

<sup>105</sup> MacGregor, p.23.



Quaker family, treated reverentially by Cecilia Brightwell, but at the home of a more radical family, perhaps the Taylor's or the Plumptre's.<sup>106</sup>

John Opie had been married, his first wife, Mary Bunn, having eloped with a Major Andrews in 1795. Opie had been granted a divorce the following year. He had also been attracted to Mary Wollstonecraft, and a letter from Amelia Opie to Mary Wollstonecraft dated 18 December 1796 includes the remark 'I hear in a letter just received from town that you are to marry Opie.... That he would be most happy to marry you, I firmly believe.'<sup>107</sup> A note survives recording his agreement to attend Wollstonecraft's funeral on 15 September 1797, which reads in its entirety: 'Sincerely lamenting the melancholy occasion. I will not fail to attend on Friday at the time and place you have mentioned'.<sup>108</sup>

Janet Whitney remarks: 'Amelia Alderson had not only to overcome her middle-class prejudice against Opie's low birth: she had also to swallow the fact that he was a divorced man. His first wife had eloped with an army officer, and Opie had divorced her.'<sup>109</sup> If, as Kavanagh suggests, 'he was smitten with love life-long and deep', Amelia Opie was less sure.<sup>110</sup> She feared the loss of her circle of

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Amelia Alderson to Mrs. Imlay, 18 December 1796; Bodleian Library, Oxford., Dep. 210/6.

<sup>108</sup> Note from John Opie to James Marshall; Bodleian Library, Oxford, Dep. C.507/14.

<sup>109</sup> Janet Whitney, *Elizabeth Fry – Quaker Heroine* (London: Harrap, 1937), p.55.

<sup>110</sup> Kavanagh, p.249.

glittering friends, but, on the other hand, as MacGregor notes, 'at twenty-six, was anxious to marry.'<sup>111</sup> She expressed her irresolution in a letter to Mrs. Taylor:

... there are moments when, ambitious of being a wife and a mother, and of securing to myself a companion for life ... I could almost resolve to break all fetters, and relinquish, too, that wide and often aristocratic circle in which I now move, and become the wife of a man whose genius has raised him from obscurity into fame and comparative affluence; but indeed my mind is on the pinnacle of its health when thus I feel; and on a pinnacle one can't remain for long!<sup>112</sup>

Kavanagh notes that Amelia 'vowed at first that his chances of success were but one to a thousand'.<sup>113</sup> John Opie persisted, however, and finally won the consent of both Amelia and her father. J. C. D. Hare wrote of Amelia's relationship with her father and the deep affection she felt for him, resonant of her later work *Father and Daughter* (1801):

When Amelia Opie married in May 1798 her chief inducement to do so was [John Opie's] promise that he would never separate her from the father to whom she had entirely devoted herself from the time of her mother's death when she was fifteen.<sup>114</sup>

The marriage took place at Marylebone Church on 8th May 1798. The couple set up home at John Opie's house at 8 Berners

<sup>111</sup> MacGregor, p.24.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Kavanagh, p.249.

<sup>114</sup> Hare, 1, p.95.

Street, London. Alderson allowed his daughter two hundred guineas a year.<sup>115</sup> The loss of social position that Amelia feared did not take place. As Whitney states, after her marriage Amelia

found matters far otherwise than she supposed. Instead of relinquishing aristocratic circles, she found the one in which she had moved before narrow indeed compared to that which the wife of Opie could command in London. Her rough-mannered but intrinsically noble husband was the fashion.<sup>116</sup>

She became known to such figures as Sir Joshua Reynolds, Mrs. Siddons and Lady Caroline Lamb.<sup>117</sup>

Opie, a committed painter, encouraged his wife in her writing. Kavanagh cites the following from Amelia's later writing, when, looking back on her marriage, she commented:

Knowing, at the time of our marriage, that my most favourite amusement was writing, he did not check my ambition to become an author; on the contrary, he encouraged it, and our only quarrel was, not that I wrote too much, but that I did not write more and better.<sup>118</sup>

Amelia Opie enjoyed her marriage, writing to Susannah Taylor of her happiness and 'a youthful enthusiasm in her new life'.<sup>119</sup> An idea of the opulent lifestyle that Amelia Opie enjoyed can be gained from the following extract from June Rose's biography of Elizabeth Fry, known in her youth as Betsy, a member of the influential and Quaker Gurney family who were to play such a part in Amelia's later

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<sup>115</sup> MacGregor, p.27.

<sup>116</sup> Whitney, p.55.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., p.56.

<sup>118</sup> Kavanagh, p.250.

<sup>119</sup> MacGregor, p.27.

life. The excerpt quotes from Betsy's diary, recording a visit to the opera in 1798, a few months after the wedding:

With her Norwich friends the Opies, she visited the opera. To her delight, the Prince of Wales was there, already a gross and flamboyant figure but, for Betsy, enchanting. She confided to her diary: 'I do love grand company ...I own I felt more pleasure in looking at him than in seeing the rest of the company or hearing the music.' That evening, encouraged by Amelia Opie, her hair was dressed again and she was painted a little. 'I did look quite pretty for me.'<sup>120</sup>

Betsy Gurney, then aged nineteen, is making quite an admission for a young woman raised in a Quaker household. Her parents would have been scandalised by her use of make-up, and must have felt very liberal in allowing her to attend the opera. There would, in time, be a certain irony in the role reversal that was to take place: instead of Amelia the socialite seducing Betsy into the worldly pleasures afforded by the capital, some twenty-six years later Betsy and her family would admit Amelia into the Society of Friends in Norwich as a convinced Quaker.

The social niche that Amelia Opie occupied at this time is the one about which she wrote. The heroines of her first three tales and several subsequent works were usually drawn from the comfortable upper-middle-class. Amelia's concern that she would lose rank on her marriage to Opie, and her evident relief when she discovered that she had actually risen in the social hierarchy as a result of marrying him, indicates that she was very conscious of the subtle gradations of the social milieu. This was to become increasingly evident in later life, as

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<sup>120</sup> June Rose, *Elizabeth Fry* (London: Macmillan, 1980), p.24.

when she corrects a 'Dear friend', probably Harriet Martineau, on her title and status: 'I am not an old maid, but the widow of a distinguished man.'<sup>121</sup> Her later letters are also scrupulous in their forms of address – something inconsistent with the egalitarian precepts of the Quakers.<sup>122</sup>

By 1798 a chapter in Amelia Opie's life, that of the single, radical young woman, was effectively over. The lively Godwin/Holcroft coterie did not survive Godwin's marriage to Wollstonecraft. The publication of William Godwin's *Memoirs of the Author of 'A Vindication of the Rights of Women'* had the effect of turning public opinion against Wollstonecraft, saddling her 'with a scandalous reputation so enduring that through the Victorian era advocates of the equality of women circumspectly avoided references to her *Vindication*.'<sup>123</sup> St.Clair explains how Godwin had pulled few punches in his *Memoirs*:

Boldly reversing the conventions of contemporary biography – which normally sought to demonstrate how admirable qualities lead to admirable achievements, the book is a vindication of Mary Wollstonecraft ... and an open celebration of characteristics which writers on women usually mentioned only to deplore.<sup>124</sup>

St. Clair also mentions 'the puzzling social conventions' in Godwin's *Memoirs* which 'had caused some of Mary Wollstonecraft's women friends to shun her as an unmarried mother and then others to shun her

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<sup>121</sup> Amelia Opie to Harriet Martineau (?), 28 February 1842: Norfolk Record Office, Norwich, Ms6181.

<sup>122</sup> See Appendix: Letters.

<sup>123</sup> Abrams et al, *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (New York: W Norton, 1993) sixth ed., 2 vols., 2, p.101.

<sup>124</sup> St.Clair, p.182.

later after she had married.'<sup>125</sup> Although Godwin's diary records visits by the Opies during the last hours of Wollstonecraft's life, Opie's letters indicate very little reference to her or Godwin after her death.<sup>126</sup>

In addition, there was little sympathy for Revolutionary France, in view of the ongoing war, the regicide and the bloodletting of the Reign of Terror. Marilyn Butler, among others, writes of the 'severe setback' English radicalism encountered in the late 1790s, and how support for the French Revolution, and therefore the possibility of a similar event in England, was no more: 'The tone of [literary London] after 1800 was caught by Charles Lamb, who that year professed an inability to interest himself in the French Revolution at all.'<sup>127</sup> Other examples of contemporary references which summarise the disenchantment felt by English radicals with Revolutionary France are, first, William Taylor, architect of *The Cabinet*, who wrote to Robert Southey in the autumn of 1799, saying: 'I grow very anti-gallican. I dislike the cause of national ambition and aggrandisement as much as I liked the cause of national representation and liberty.'<sup>128</sup> The second is from Joseph Kinghorn, the Norwich preacher, who had written so enthusiastically to his father on 3 August 1789.<sup>129</sup> Kinghorn now wrote at great length of his distaste for the French:

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., p.399.

<sup>126</sup> Kegan Paul, 1, p.274-5.

<sup>127</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Burke, Paine, Godwin and the Revolution Controversy* (Cambridge, CUP, 1984), p.12.

<sup>128</sup> Jewson, p.91.

<sup>129</sup> Wilkin Papers, County Record Office, Norwich.

The French are now awfull (*sic*) scourges on the continent. ... Exaggeration is very common among men and it is probable that they are not so black as they are by some described. But besides their cruelties, which are unequalled by anything lately in Europe, ... and their having strumpets drawn in processions as Goddesses, (*sic*) &c., &c. ... All those notions of liberty which the French Revolution very generally raised a few years ago are at an end, they are the tyrants, not the deliverers of men.<sup>130</sup>

John Opie did well to encourage his wife in her writing. He was to hit a period of time when commissions for his work ceased for a while as a result of the difficult conditions which were being experienced throughout the country at the time of their marriage. The war with France was proving expensive: taxes were increasing, peace negotiations were unproductive and there was the constant fear of an invasion by Napoleon. Amelia Opie, on the other hand, was preparing to publish the first novel to bear her name, *Father and Daughter*.




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<sup>130</sup> Jewson, p.92.

## CHAPTER 3

The London Years: *Father and Daughter* (1801).

In the early months of 1801, John and Amelia Opie experienced a period of financial stringency. Settled into John Opie's house at 8 Berners Street, in London's West End, they found themselves short of money: John had had three months almost entirely without commissions, in contrast to the success he had enjoyed in 1799 and 1800.<sup>1</sup> Brightwell includes a comment from Opie's now-missing journal stating that 'great economy and self-denial were necessary and were strictly observed by us at that time'.<sup>2</sup> Amelia Opie dedicated herself to supporting her husband through his despondency, partly by vigorously canvassing for sitters for him.<sup>3</sup> She was far from unhappy, however: a letter to Robert Garnham in Bury St. Edmonds tells of her 'most quiet, domestic, happy life' and how the world 'has little to bestow capable of drawing me from my fireside without reluctance'.<sup>4</sup>

Her surviving letters to Susannah Taylor discuss literary and artistic figures and mutual friends such as James Northcote, George Dyer, Eliza Fenwick, Mrs. Siddons, Elizabeth Fry and the Plumptre

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<sup>1</sup> MacGregor, p.29.

<sup>2</sup> Brightwell, p.69.

<sup>3</sup> See for example: Amelia Opie to Robert Garnham, 1801 and Amelia Opie to Garnham, 14 June 1802; Crabb Robinson Collection, Dr Williams' Library, London: Amelia Opie to Prince Hoare, 6 Dec. \_\_; Knox College Archives, Galesburg, Ill.

<sup>4</sup> Amelia Opie to Garnham, 1801; Dr Williams' Library, London.



sisters, particularly Anne Plumptre's 'entanglement' with Mr Bartheleme and her previous affair with Robert Merry.<sup>5</sup> She informs Mrs Taylor that Elizabeth Inchbald is to look at her poems, commenting that 'Poetry to her [Inchbald] is an undiscovered country'.<sup>6</sup> Her letters to both Taylor and Garnham also speak of political matters. To Taylor she describes a 'rot amongst royalty'.<sup>7</sup> To Garnham she writes disparagingly of Pitt, Addington and 'the Royal Bigot' and records her pleasure at Horne Tooke's gaining a (short-lived) seat in the House 'at last'. The letter comments how in 'times as gloomy as the present, where should we turn from the approaching storm but to those hearts which beat in unison with our own'.<sup>8</sup> A letter to Garnham of a few months later records a visit by 'Citizen Stanhope', the democratic third earl, together with William Smith, the radical candidate for Norwich, and records her view of post-revolutionary France as a failed Utopia but which yet retained the abolition of hereditary peerages.<sup>9</sup> The political sentiments in both letters are those of the radical in retreat, indicative perhaps of the tenor of opinion of the time among educated persons of liberal temperament, as seen in Lamb's comment in the preceding chapter, and reveal a political perspective absent in other letters of the time. Here is

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<sup>5</sup> Amelia Opie to Susannah Taylor, 'Sunday evening' 1801 and 22 March 1801; Huntington Institute, Ca., OP63 and OP64.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 March 1801.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Opie to Garnham, 1801.

<sup>9</sup> Opie to Garnham, 14 June 1802; Dr Williams's Library, London.

evidence of a trend which becomes apparent in reading the range of Opie's correspondence presently extant: her ability to construct herself according to her correspondent. In later years this tendency becomes more noticeable, writing as she does to three main groups of people: Quakers, where religious and pious references abound; aristocratic connections, where issues of social precedence and niceties of manner occur; and her family, to whom she seems to write without a mask.<sup>10</sup>

Opie also refers to her writing, which, according to Brightwell, she artlessly describes in her journal as 'my most favourite amusement'.<sup>11</sup> She was evidently very productive at this time. In addition to working on *Father and Daughter*, her letter to Prince Hoare referred to above, for example, also asks him to read her comedy. Such a minimising of writing as an 'amusement' by women writers was deemed only decorous at the time, as Jan Fergus has pointed out in writing of Jane Austen.<sup>12</sup> Opie's describing her writing in the way she does follows the contemporary notion that women writers were dangerous and misguided people whose obsession with the pen caused them to neglect familial responsibilities: talked of in these terms, the potency of the activity of writing becomes disarmed into amateurism. Some years later, Opie herself presented a view of the woman writer at the time:

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix: Letters.

<sup>11</sup> Brightwell, p.70.

<sup>12</sup> Jan Fergus, *Jane Austen: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), p.5.

The abstract idea of an authoress in ancient days was a dirty, ill-dressed, ragged, snuffly-nosed woman who could not perform any of the common and necessary duties of her sex ... such still continues to be, amongst most men and many women, the abstract idea of a female writer.<sup>13</sup>

Even in most the progressive circles in London, she continues, 'the very highest praise which could be given to a female writer would be, "She is really an agreeable woman and I never should have guessed she was an authoress."' <sup>14</sup>

Similarly, Harriet Martineau, another Dissenting writer of Norwich, later writes that

for a woman [writer] to have any sort of reputation (good or bad), was for her to have a bad name, and to be beyond the literary pale. To seek public attention - and that was precisely what the publication of a book entailed - was for a woman to lay herself open to every charge of indecency.<sup>15</sup>

Such descriptors indicate the way in which a woman writer of the day thought it necessary to construct herself, and Opie's later biographers, notably Brightwell, play their respective parts in aiding this construction. A less guarded comment on a woman, her reputation and her writing is found in Opie's description of Helen Maria Williams in a letter to Mrs Taylor. After discussing Anne Plumptre's relationship with Bartheleme, she writes of

the fair, perfidious Helen Maria whom Mrs Barbauld persists to think immaculate in virgin purity - & on no other ground than that she writes word that she is still a virgin, and writes like a

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<sup>13</sup> Amelia Opie, *A Cure for Scandal, or Detraction Displayed* (London: Longman, 1828), p.133.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Harriet Martineau, *Harriet Martineau on Women*, ed. G. G. Yates (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1985), p.36.

simple, ingenuous, candid young woman – Ergo, if she were *not* a virgin, I suppose Mrs B. concludes she would be so sincere as to say so.<sup>16</sup>

The comment betrays a writerly interest in the conventions of which Opie wrote: the contested ground between appearance, reputation and a personal reality, presented in a witty, confiding manner typical of Opie's style to her confidante and others with whom she could feel able to talk intimately. The reference to perfidy perhaps relates to Williams's outspoken support for the French Revolution when the subject had become unfashionable, or to her elopement to Paris with a married man, John Hurford Stone.

Edward Copeland has pointed out the significance of a woman writer presenting herself as adept at managing her own finances and those of her family. In discussing the management of a retrospective reconstruction of the self by a writer, Copeland notes that

Years later, when [Frances] Burney, as Madame d'Arblay, wife, mother and respectable lady of letters, prepared her journals for publication, she painstakingly expunged passages that dealt with that one subject, money.<sup>17</sup>

The significance of stringent financial management was a prevalent issue for both the women writing at this time and the heroines in their novels and tales. Opie was to show her own awareness of the topicality of the issue in her portrayal of two of her heroines: Agnes, in *Father and Daughter* and Adeline in *Adeline Mowbray*. To live in London at a time Copeland has called 'one of the

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<sup>16</sup> Opie to Mrs Taylor, 22 March 1801.

<sup>17</sup> Edward Copeland, *Women Writing About Money* (Cambridge: CUP, 1995), p.15.

most extravagant of the period' was to live expensively, particularly as the Opies did in a fashionable part such as the new West End as distinct from, for example, Godwin's more bohemian address in Somers Town. Such extravagance risked the consequences of inflation and the 'pressing dangers to women from debt: harassment, humiliation, confinement.'<sup>18</sup> Charlotte Smith, for example, was constantly harassed by debt, a motif in all ten of her novels.<sup>19</sup>

Women's financial precariousness was caused by two main factors, one social, the other legal: first, according to Copeland, the woman's control of the domestic budget was customarily restricted to a shillings and pence economy of subsistence shopping, and she was dependant on her husband or father for these funds.<sup>20</sup> Second, women had few inheritance rights to land, traditionally the principal source of wealth, although this status was changing as wealth generated from manufacture and investment grew.<sup>21</sup> Such a situation drives many a novel of the time, notably Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), in which the Bennet sisters have to find a way to avoid the poverty which threatens them on the death of their father, whose income is derived from his property. Similarly Frances Burney's *The Wiltings* (1779) and *Camilla* (1796) reflected her own severe problems with debt.

Despite Amelia Opie's anxiety, however, she was fairly well-

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.7.

<sup>19</sup> See Charlotte Smith to Joseph Walker, 16 October 1794; Huntington Library, San Marino, California, in Copeland, p.7.

<sup>20</sup> Copeland, pp.17-19.

<sup>21</sup> See Susan Staves, esp. pp.131 & ff.

placed compared to several other women writers: she later recorded how she had married on a dowry from her father of £200 p.a. 'sure'.<sup>22</sup> The two works which were to signal the end of this brief period of enforced frugality and firmly establish Amelia Opie as a popular author of significance in her time were *Father and Daughter*, published in 1801, and *Poems*, 1802.

The times had placed this pair of artists in interesting contrast. John, the painter, was obliged to seek commissions and patronage, in a way which had not changed since the Renaissance in Italy four hundred years earlier. Conversely, Amelia plied the more modern art of fiction-writing, a form of expression which requires no patronage: given the interest of a publisher and a favourable review or two, the writer can provide for herself. As Jane Spencer succinctly puts it, women writers turned to novel-writing 'because they could make money from it'.<sup>23</sup> Cheryl Turner identifies the 'dramatic unparalleled surge' of women novelists in the 1780s and produces graphs to show a number of women novelists not rising above twenty from 1700 to 1780, followed by a sudden fourfold increase between 1780 and 1800.<sup>24</sup> Then, as now, not every novel or tale was a money-spinner: first novels, particularly, were and are of low financial value. Copeland notes how Jean Marishall's *Clarinda Cathcart* (1766) was purchased by the publisher Noble for five guineas. Jane Austen's

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<sup>22</sup> Amelia Opie to Henry Briggs, dd. 25 July 1830; Huntington Institute, Ca., OP100.

<sup>23</sup> Spencer, p.7.

<sup>24</sup> Cheryl Turner, *Living by the Pen* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.39.

*Susan*, published later as *Northanger Abbey*, was sold for £10 to Crosby, who never published it but sold it back to Austen years later for the same price.<sup>25</sup> In contrast with the painter, who can be seen as a consumer of wealth, with the investment by the patron reflected in the value of the work of art, the writer is a creator of wealth for herself and others, through the utilisation of print technology, the processes of distribution and retailing, and the identification of a market, all of which had become established by the end of the eighteenth century. That the majority of fiction writers at this time were women not only puts the term 'patronage' into a gendered context, but also suggests the radical nature of the act of a woman writing, and by extension the social risks that such women writers ran. MacGregor notes how

Aside from financial worries, Mrs Opie had cause for anxiety. *Father and Daughter* was soon to be published. Unlike *The Dangers of Coquetry*, it was not to appear anonymously, and Mrs Opie was apprehensive of an unfavourable reception.<sup>26</sup>

Opie's anxiety over the reception of *Father and Daughter* was expressed in the letters to Garnham and Mrs Taylor referred to above.<sup>27</sup> She wrote to Mrs Taylor: 'As usual, all the *good* I saw in my work, before it was printed, is now vanished from my sight, and I remember only its faults.'<sup>28</sup> However, there was more at stake than the financial reward of a best-seller. Matthew Grenby indicates the paradox faced

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<sup>25</sup> Copeland, p.197.

<sup>26</sup> MacGregor, p.32.

<sup>27</sup> Amelia Opie to Garnham, 1801; to Mrs Taylor, 22 March 1801.

<sup>28</sup> Opie to Taylor, 22 March 1801.

by women writers, even those with a message which was not overtly radical.<sup>29</sup> The very act of writing in the first place having put her reputation in jeopardy, the female writer had to assure her readers of the faultlessness of her moral and religious opinions. Grenby writes: 'she is most worried that readers will imagine that her having written a novel would have interfered with her true duties as a woman, the very duties she was endorsing in the fiction' and later 'she felt it necessary to add that in writing the novel, no social or domestic duty had been sacrificed or postponed'.<sup>30</sup> Here he is discussing Eliza Parsons's *Woman as she Should Be; or Memoirs of Mrs Melville* (1793), but one can see that the paradox must have applied to all women writing at that time. The conflict between writing and familial duties for women is still an issue, amply described in more recent writings such as Tillie Olsen's *Silences*.<sup>31</sup> The issue here, however, is more subtle: that of the woman writer departing from a preordained manner of existence, namely familial nurturing, by the very act of writing. Just as with running the risk of being branded a coquette and the ignominy consequent on that, a woman writer risked her reputation, and, as Harriet Martineau suggests, by seeking publication, lost it.

Roger Sales, in *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England* demonstrates how biographers of female writers, in this case Jane Austen, may have distorted their subjects so as to make them

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<sup>29</sup> Grenby, p.2

<sup>30</sup> Grenby, p.3 and p.8 respectively.

<sup>31</sup> Tillie Olsen, *Silences* (London: Virago, 1970).



appear virtuous and family-oriented despite having this disturbing propensity to be sufficiently unfeminine as to write novels, and I have already indicated how Fanny Burney retrospectively defined herself in this way.<sup>32</sup>

On this point of the interfaces between the identity of the woman writer, her work and society, Grenby continues:

Works which did transgress the limits of what it was proper to put in a novel, and particularly a novel by a woman, were, by the later 1790s, greeted by a solid front of really quite vehement reprehension ... by a variety of different groups, all self-appointed guardians of literature.<sup>33</sup>

He instances publishers, proprietors of bookshops and circulating libraries and critics such as William Gifford (1756-1826), editor of the Tory-supported *Quarterly Review*, and Thomas Mathias (1754?-1835), the satirist, who were ‘famously ruining the reputations of authors [such as] Mary Robinson and Mary Hays, and Charlotte Smith too to an extent, by castigating them as “tainted with democracy”’.<sup>34</sup> The taint was not reserved for women writers: for example, Holcroft had been a victim of loyalist denunciations of the verdict delivered at his trial.<sup>35</sup> Godwin had revised his *Political Justice* of 1793 for a second edition, and later wrote distancing himself from

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<sup>32</sup> Roger Sales, *Jane Austen and Representations of Regency England* (London: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>33</sup> Grenby, p.10.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

<sup>35</sup> Barrell, p.397.

some of his earlier ideas.<sup>36</sup>

Whether the opprobrium derives from gender or from political ideology is uncertain. It seems clear, however, that members of the establishment felt themselves threatened by the new generation of women writers. On the question of political alignment, Amelia Opie was certainly aware of the odium heaped on Mary Wollstonecraft after her death and Godwin's subsequent publication of his biography of her, and the difficulties facing women writers who aligned themselves with her and expressed similar radical views, such as Mary Hays. William Godwin himself was aware of the way in which, even before the publication of his biography of Mary Wollstonecraft, public taste was moving into a reactionary phase: writing of the year 1797, he comments:

... the cry [of reaction] spread like a general infection, and I have been told that not even a petty novel for boarding-school misses now ventures to aspire to favour unless it contains some expression of dislike or abhorrence to the new philosophy.<sup>37</sup>

The extent of this reactionary shift is summarised by Marilyn Butler, who writes: 'By the mid-1790s reaction against all that Revolution stood for encompassed most of the important features of sentimental narrative writing.'<sup>38</sup> Opie had been a member of the Wollstonecraft-Godwin circle from 1794 to 1796: it would have been easy for a reviewer to use this against her.

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<sup>36</sup> See Godwin, 'The Principal Revolutions of Opinion' in *Collected Novels and Memoirs of William Godwin*, ed. M. Phelps, (London: Pickering, 1992), 1, p.53.

<sup>37</sup> H. N. Brailsford, *Shelley, Godwin and their Circle* (London, 1913), p.156.

<sup>38</sup> Marilyn Butler, *Jane Austen and the War of Ideas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p.7.

The title of Opie's second tale, as given on the title page, is *Father and Daughter: a Tale, in Prose*. There is a frontispiece plate designed by John Opie and engraved by Joshua Reynolds, then Professor of Painting at the Royal Academy, whom John Opie was to succeed in 1805. It shows a young woman loosely attired and with her long hair reaching below her knees. As she enters a dark room or cell, where she sees with evident horror an older man dressed in rags who points to a graffitto which reads 'Agnes'. The accompanying subscription reads: 'she saw that he had drawn the shape of a coffin and was then writing on the lid the name of Agnes'.

There is also a quotation on the title page attributed to Anna Laetitia Barbauld (1743-1825), the Suffolk teacher, critic and writer.

The verse reads:

Thy sweet reviving smiles might cheer despair,  
On the pale lips detain the parting breath,  
And bid hope to blossom in the shades of death.<sup>39</sup>

The significance of this sentiment lies in the protagonist's struggle to nurse her father back to health and sanity after the asylum had discharged him as incurable. Unfortunately, the attribution could not be verified from a collection of Barbauld's verse.<sup>40</sup>

A dedication to her father, 'Dr Alderson of Norwich', also appears on the title page which is signed 'Amelia Opie, Berners St.,

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<sup>39</sup> Amelia Opie, *Father and Daughter* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1801). Subsequent quotations are from this edition, and page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

<sup>40</sup> *The Poems of Anna Laetitia Barbauld*, ed. by William McCarthy & Elizabeth Kraft (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1994).

1800'. The Preface states that this work is not a novel: 'its highest pretensions are, to be a SIMPLE, MORAL TALE.' (p.viii). It seems evident from the word 'tale' and her capitalization that Opie was anxious that the work was to be seen as uncontentious, as noted in Chapter One. This evident determination to avoid the conventions of novelistic style is also manifest in the way the tale is told as a continuous narrative, without being split up into chapters.

The very ordinariness of Opie's tales and their protagonists, within the frame of polite society, is one of their principal strengths and the reason for their success in their day. Amelia Opie's success was in showing many of her protagonists as young middle-class women with whom young middle-class readers might easily identify. This kind of characterisation is consistent through her tales and her verse, even to some extent in her master-work *Adeline Mowbray*. As Clara Whitmore wrote in 1910: 'These novels should be preserved, not necessarily for their literary excellence, but because they bear the imprint of an age.'<sup>41</sup> Eleanor Ty similarly comments that *Father and Daughter* 'can be read as a gauge of the values that were prized, tolerated or deemed unacceptable to English society at the turn of the century'.<sup>42</sup>

The protagonist of *Father and Daughter*, Agnes Fitzhenry, is a young woman in thrall to her widowed father and, as Julia Kavanagh puts it, 'beautiful, accomplished, virtuous, a widowed father's only and

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<sup>41</sup> Clara H. Whitmore, *Women's Work in English Fiction* (New York: Putnam, 1910), p.149.

<sup>42</sup> Ty, 1998, pp.133-134.

beloved child, and all that father could wish.<sup>43</sup> She becomes the object of a seducer's attentions: Clifford, a soldier, 'loves her as a man can love who is resolved not to marry'.<sup>44</sup> To Agnes, thoughts of pre-marital sex are repugnant, but she is so infatuated with the libertine that she fears to lose him. Amelia Opie is here presenting an everyday situation, but from a point of view arguably different from that of a radical writer such as Wollstonecraft: the reader is persuaded of Agnes's virtue, and yet aware of how fragile this becomes when confronted by the wiles of a seducer. This not only echoes her earlier work, *The Dangers of Coquetry*, but establishes a distance between Opie and Wollstonecraft and her disciple Mary Hays, whose heroines wished to have sexual autonomy, free from the conventions of contemporary society. Opie is writing in the sentimental tradition, in which the fallen woman is generally portrayed as victim of a callous, predatory male rather than a sexualised being. In this respect, the sentimental tradition may be seen as less radical than the writing of Hays and Wollstonecraft. This difference in writing is also a difference in the lives of the women writers themselves. Clara Whitmore observes succinctly that Opie's 'imagination did not, however, yield to the life of perfect freedom, a dream which wrecked the life of Mary Wollstonecraft.'<sup>45</sup>

From the beginning of the tale, the moral ground is with the

<sup>43</sup> Kavanagh, p.272.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Whitmore, p.149.

protagonist, and therefore the mainstream reader can readily identify with her dilemma. The tale's conventionality actually served this purpose. Kavanagh remarked that 'Her very want of the highest literary qualities - thought, strength of language and vigorous character - gave [Opie] easy and prompt access to every mind'.<sup>46</sup> What may appear as a condemnation by Kavanagh is actually a strength: Opie's work, although limited, would thus be eminently publishable in an expanding market peopled by less educated readers and which was in a reactionary swing away from Wollstonecraftian rhetoric. Indeed, Opie's tale has many of the ingredients of the style of sentimentalism, which, for radicals, had become somewhat *passé* by 1801.<sup>47</sup> This retrospective style has the twin effects of distancing Opie's work from that of Wollstonecraft and her circle, and presenting to a reader a familiar-seeming, and therefore innocuous vehicle for her tales.

What is of significance in *Father and Daughter* is Agnes's beauty and Opie's handling of this feature. Isobel Grundy discusses the convention of the beautiful female.<sup>48</sup> 'To be beautiful', she writes, 'is to be an object for the gaze ... a beautiful outside is the sign of wisdom and goodness inside, and the reverse means stupidity, malevolence or sin.' Later, discussing the conventions of female beauty in romantic writing, she continues:

<sup>46</sup> Kavanagh, p.270.

<sup>47</sup> See Todd, 1986, pp.130-132.

<sup>48</sup> Isobel Grundy, 'Against Beauty: Eighteenth-Century Fiction Writers Confront the Problem of Woman-as-sign' in S. Neumann and G. Stephenson, eds., *Re-imag(in)ing Women* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), p.74.

The novelist may shape her characters according to the dictates of symbolic and gendered readings, or may seek to intervene in such systems of meaning. To give a fictional character beauty is to construct her as a sexual object, and more generally as material, as a sign traditionally placed to be responded to by the male subject.<sup>49</sup>

She summarises: 'Heroines must be beautiful because, with heroes, they exist as signs to be read.' And, in a discussion of Samuel Richardson's heroine Pamela, she writes of the same kind of balance between physical beauty and virtue that Opie is at pains to construct for her three principal protagonists, Louisa, Agnes and Adeline:

While the beauty of .... Pamela makes her desirable, the delicacy and fragility which are perhaps the most important components of her beauty enable it to symbolise chastity and innocence rather than provocation.<sup>50</sup>

Opie's longstanding friend Anne Plumptre took issue with the convention of the beautiful heroine in her work *Something New: or, Adventures at Cambell House*, published within weeks of *Father and Daughter*. Deborah McLeod, in her introduction to the most recent edition of this novel, cites its introductory verse and remarks that

It is the stranglehold of the beautiful heroine convention upon the novel that Plumptre addresses in *Something New*. In a spirited prefatory poem, she declares the convention ... has exercised its tyranny far too long. ... Plumptre challenges the primacy of the beautiful heroine convention boldly:

'No, we'll the RIGHTS OF AUTHORS here defend,  
And in these pages place before your view

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p.75.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.76.

An UGLY heroine - Is't not SOMETHING NEW?<sup>51</sup>

In similar vein, Sarah Scott's *Millenium Hall* (1762), which describes a female utopian community, departed from conventional notions of the beautiful heroine. It would appear that as women began to write in greater numbers, they were able to challenge some of the male-based conventions of the novel, and it is not surprising that the notion of worth and virtue being signalled by physical beauty was one of the first to be called into question. Prior to that time, as McLeod notes, the convention seems unopposed. She indicates how

Even Sarah Scott in *Agreeable Ugliness: or, the Triumph of the Graces* (1754) - a work predicated on the ugliness of the heroine - ameliorates her main character's unattractiveness by the end of the novel.<sup>52</sup>

The convention of beauty equating with virtue was thus under attack by 1801, and it is interesting to see how Amelia Opie manages this characteristic in her protagonists. We have already seen how Louisa, in *The Dangers of Coquetry*, is described as 'more than beautiful', but how descriptors of her physical beauty are diminished by descriptors of her character.<sup>53</sup> Agnes is similarly described: the word 'beautiful' is only one of three descriptors, the other two, 'accomplished' and 'virtuous', relating to non-physical attributes, which convey a more abstract notion of beauty. When Opie's masterpiece *Adeline Mowbray* was published four years later, we find

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<sup>51</sup> Plumptre, pp.xvi-xvii.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.xvi.

<sup>53</sup> [Opie], 1790, 1, p.2.



that Adeline's physical beauty is similarly downplayed. Despite possessing 'some pretensions to what is denominated beauty' in the 'uncommon fairness and delicacy of her complexion, the lustre of her hazel eyes,' and so forth, Opie negates these descriptors of physical beauty by claiming that 'her own sex declared she was plain'.<sup>54</sup> Her beauty mainly consisted in 'the beauty of expression of countenance' and 'the lightness and grace of her movements'.<sup>55</sup> While this may be an ironic writing of female jealousy, nevertheless Opie is careful to make neither Agnes nor Adeline actually glamorous, lest it impinge upon her ingenuousness and her virtue. Even Louisa's glamour in *The Dangers of Coquetry* is that of adolescence and therefore lacking in sophistication.

The pathos surrounding Louisa's tale in *The Dangers of Coquetry* is based on the terrible vulnerability arising from the tension between her outgoing, vain nature with its habit of 'unguarded levity' and her inexperience. In *Father and Daughter*, however, Agnes's character is constructed differently: her virtue is symbolised by an external beauty, but not one that is unequivocally luxurious, as with Louisa. Instead of Opie's description of Louisa as 'more than beautiful ... when she walked, danced or sung, every eye perused, and every tongue applauded her' (v.1, p.2), with her 'profusion of pale brown hair' and other sensual physical attributes (v.1, p34), Agnes is described in more restrained tones. While she is sufficiently beautiful

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<sup>54</sup> Opie, *Adeline Mowbray*, 1999 edn., p.19.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

to attract the male gaze which is the cause of her downfall, Opie's phrasing foregrounds her virtue. Following the convention Grundy describes, the reader thus would appear to be left in no doubt as to her innocence. Grundy points out in such cases that this may be either supported or subverted, although the latter option does not seem to be the case with Opie's protagonist.<sup>56</sup> As to her maidenhood, the text downplays the sexual aspect of her cohabitation with Clifford to the extent that the reader feels that she imagines she can live with him without having sex. To his first suggestions of cohabiting, 'against which her delicacy and every feeling revolted ... Agnes would fain have objected in the strongest manner' (p.22). It seems that it is not her libido but her romantic emotions which are captivated by the opportunist Clifford in a way which only emphasises her ingenuousness and vulnerability. It is interesting that in this separation of the physical and the emotional or abstract constructions of desire, there are features here which prefigure *Adeline Mowbray*, in which the protagonist is so convinced of the philosophical rightness of her cerebral relationship with Glenmurray that she is constantly surprised by the ostracism she experiences from others who, even after Glenmurray's death, only see the inappropriateness of a physical relationship between them. In *Father and Daughter*, Opie constructs a tale of a woman who is mistaken in love. She underscores this with a reference in a footnote to remarks on love in Elizabeth Inchbald's novel *Nature and Art* (1796). The quotation to which she refers reads

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<sup>56</sup> Grundy, p.74.

as follows:

It has been said by a celebrated writer, upon the affection subsisting between the two sexes, 'that there are many persons who, if they had never heard of the passion of love, would never have felt it.' Might it not with equal truth be added, that – there are many more, who having heard of it, and believing most firmly that they feel it, are nevertheless mistaken?<sup>57</sup>

Ty has pointed out the similarity of Agnes's plight to a subplot in Inchbald's novel.<sup>58</sup> There is further similarity in the description each writer uses to portray her heroine. Inchbald's Hannah

was formed by the rarest structure of the human frame, and fated by the tenderest thrillings of the human soul, to inspire and to experience real love – but her nice taste, her delicate thoughts, were so refined beyond the sphere of her own station in society.<sup>59</sup>

These words convey the same physical beauty, emotional capabilities and sense of propriety that are drawn into Agnes's character. Beyond this similarity, however, and the similar speed with which the beautiful and dutiful Hannah Primrose is seduced, Inchbald's novel is broader and sterner of purpose, with its elements of social protest and pioneering ideas that the inferior classes are capable of fine sensibilities. Opie is content with an emotive cautionary tale which treats themes of guilt and remorse. A view of a moralistic artisan ideology does not appear until *Temper* (1812).

Clifford has his way with the fragile virtue of Agnes. The

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<sup>57</sup> Elizabeth Inchbald, *Nature and Art*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Woodstock Books, 1994), 1, p.141.

<sup>58</sup> Ty, 1998, p.141.

<sup>59</sup> Inchbald, p.142.

seducer 'meditates with savage delight on the success of his plans' in enticing her to elope to London, where he takes her virginity (p.23).

The narrative gives no indelicate details: the reader is only informed that Clifford 'had triumphed over the virtue of Agnes' (p.25). Having made his conquest, he promptly rejoins his regiment.

Another signifier of Agnes's virtue is in the foil character which Opie constructs. In *The Dangers of Coquetry*, the foil of Caroline Egerton is in total contrast to that of the protagonist Louisa. In *Father and Daughter*, Agnes's foil is the character Caroline Seymour, again a childhood friend, but the contrast between the two is much less marked. Caroline Seymour, who is able to retain her virtue, is sufficiently attractive for Clifford to propose marriage to her, in contrast to his ambitions for Agnes, which were solely sexual. The purpose of the foil here is not to contrast propriety with sexuality – for Agnes has none – but social cachet with social ostracism.

In comparing Opie's work with others, Susan Staves describes *Father and Daughter* as an example of 'the seduced-maiden novel'.<sup>60</sup> Ty, however, makes the important point that 'in Opie's tale, the seduced maiden is the central rather than the secondary character of the work', and that the conventional roles of protagonist and foil have thus been reversed.<sup>61</sup> Ty points out that 'In *Father and Daughter*, Agnes is

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<sup>60</sup> Susan Staves, 'British Seduced Maidens', *Eighteenth Century Studies*, 14 (Winter 1980), p.109.

<sup>61</sup> Ty, 1998, p.135.

the locus of interest, not an abject other.<sup>62</sup> Opie is therefore able to conduct a full analysis of the plight of the seduced woman, particularly in terms of her social isolation and her overwhelming feelings of guilt. It is this primary role in the narrative that enables those readers who censure Agnes's plight to become aware of their own hypocrisy.

A further important aspect of the differences between protagonist and foil is the role of the parent. Neither Agnes nor Caroline Seymour has a living mother, a similarity with Louisa in *The Dangers of Coquetry*. However, whereas Agnes's father is disabled by Clifford's seduction of his daughter, Caroline's father, unemasculated, serves as her protector. The authority of Seymour over his daughter is in contrast with Agnes's father, who had often indulged her, thereby, so the narrative suggests, making her self-assured enough to disobey him in eloping with Clifford. It is this act which drives him to madness, and it would be within the conventions of father-daughter relationships in the late eighteenth century to see this as a kind of nemesis for his indulgence of his daughter.<sup>63</sup> The spoiling of children is a theme which becomes a major preoccupation for Opie, as revealed in *Temper* (1812), *Illustrations of Lying* (1825) and *Tales of the Pemberton Family* (1825), as well as several of her short stories. The indulgent father may also be compared with the indulgent husband Mortimer in *The Dangers of Coquetry*. Opie's heroines appear to test the parameters of male authority and, when it is not exercised with

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> See, for example, Caroline Gonda, *Reading Daughters' Fictions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

sufficient vigour, disobey it with disastrous consequences. This conservative, authoritarian treatment is in contrast to the indulgence and respect that Opie appeared to enjoy in her own life.

This contrast between the two women because of their fathering is made clear in the incident in which Agnes, totally destitute and with her child, learns of Clifford's plan to marry Caroline. Aware of the place of ignominy to which society has assigned her, she nevertheless attempts to see Caroline at her father's house, to warn her of Clifford's faithless nature. Once there, however, she is thrown out by Mr. Seymour: 'He desired her to leave his house directly, as it should be no harbour for abandoned women and unnatural children' (p.106). He does this to protect his own daughter's reputation. Caroline is sympathetic to her friend's plight, but powerless to assist further: she surreptitiously gives Agnes twenty guineas out of pity. She is also now in the position of knowing that she is contracted to marry a sexual adventurer of the worst sort, although to dilate upon her more exquisitely painful situation is not within Opie's ambit or purpose. Opie does, however, make plain that Mr Seymour was not unduly harsh by the standards of the day in taking this firm line with Agnes:

There was not a kinder-hearted man in the world than Mr Seymour; and in his severity towards Agnes, he acted more from what he thought his duty, than his inclination. He was the father of several daughters, and it was his opinion that a parent could not too forcibly inculcate on the minds of young women the salutary truth that loss of virtue must be to them the loss of friends. (p.111)

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Opie's word-choice is interesting: 'he *thought* his duty' (my italics). The reader is not entirely sure whether Opie agrees with his thinking and consequent actions or not, and her cautiousness in this respect is indicative of the reactionary state of the times. However, there are distinct similarities between Mr Seymour and Opie's later creation Dr Norberry in *Adeline Mowbray*, who epitomises the cautious father, particularly when, after snubbing her when meeting her while with his daughters, he visits Adeline to explain and justify his action (pp.88-89). With this link in mind, the reader may detect that Opie feels Seymour's severity requires exculpation and his hard-line attitude to what he sees as his duty is mistaken. Any apology for Seymour's actions in Opie's phrase would not, however, make life any easier for Agnes, who, unaware of her father's madness at this point in the narrative, only knows that she has heard nothing from him. Her father's madness is an incapacity to take any action on her behalf which might rehabilitate her in the eyes of society. In contrast to Mr. Seymour's powerful intervention, Agnes' father seems to have been rendered impotent in this matter, perhaps as the result of the terrible injury done to him by her elopement. Caroline Gonda, discussing the magnitude of this sin against the father, quotes from the conduct book *The Ladies' Calling* (1673) by Richard Allestree, which was reprinted throughout the eighteenth century: daughters falling in love without their parents' consent was 'one of the highest injuries they can do their parents, who have such a native right in them'.<sup>64</sup> This episode certainly

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<sup>64</sup> Richard Allestree, *The Ladies' Calling*, reprinted 1993, p.160, in Gonda, p.15.

indicates that indulgent fathers are not in their daughters' best interests, although this conventional view runs counter to Amelia Opie's own situation – and we must recall that the book is dedicated to Dr. Alderson.

An interesting refinement in the narrative is a ploy used by Clifford to impel Agnes into a self-imposed isolation to avoid embarrassing his chances of marrying Caroline: he arranges for her to receive false information that her father has remarried. Clifford knows that this, combined with the lack of communication from her father, she will take as indicative of her father's severing paternal ties as an expression of his anger at her elopement. He imagines that she will therefore be unwilling to turn to her father for any assistance. Since she is also ostracised by London society, her isolation is complete.

The portrayal of Agnes and Caroline together for the last time can be seen as a depiction of woman as commodity, both in Agnes's case (sampled and rejected) and Caroline's (saleable if kept intact), and by extension, the power of the rapacious male. Clifford is presented here in a similar way to the odious figure Osborne of Mary Hay's *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799). Even Mr Seymour, kindest of men, father of many daughters, when he speaks of 'abandoned' women betrays the consumerist nature of gender relationships at that time.

The unequal ordering of the sexes meant that women were almost inevitably the resistors of male predation, although this is not to imply that all males were necessarily predators. Women were



vulnerable to loss, not only of reputation, but of family, legal means of sustaining themselves, and ultimately their health. Recalling the legal nullity which most women had to accept as their base, as indicated by both Watts and Staves, it is hardly surprising that most could see no way but to comply with, and thereby support, this inequality in order to try to avoid these losses. Caroline is a portrayal of that reluctant acceptance, Agnes of the price of non-compliance. In real life, the struggle of those women who attempted other courses, such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Hays, as in the fictional characters these writers created, attests to the verisimilitude of the fictional portrayal.

At this point in Opie's narrative the paradigm of power is clearly articulated. Both the women, Agnes and Caroline, are in positions of powerlessness. Agnes is unable to achieve any retribution against Clifford for his seduction of her, much less fend for herself and her child in a society which regards her as outcast. Caroline is virtually powerless to refuse to marry the man who has treated her best friend so falsely. By contrast, both males are enjoying positions of considerable power. Clifford is able to marry whom he pleases, irrespective of his previous falsity. This is clearly power derived from the almost completely unassailable position of the male in society. Seymour is exercising his paternal power in forbidding Caroline to have any contact with Agnes, who alone can inform her of Clifford's duplicitous nature. This is the power of rectitude, of prudence, of paternal protection, coming from well within the bounds of acceptable behaviour. From both within and without these bounds, the males hold

sway and the females are rendered passive and incapable of any self-assertion save the covert passing of twenty guineas from one to the other.

Agnes, in her indigent state, can only seek to return to the familial home by whatever means she can, taking her child with her. There she anticipates, and the reader with her, that she must throw herself on the mercy of a further male, her father, whom she believes has remarried and whom she defied in eloping with Clifford. It is hard to think of a situation which more poignantly reveals the vulnerability of the ostracised female.

In delineating situations such as this, Opie is simply defining the social paradigm rather than taking a stand, neither endorsing it nor condemning it. Ty comments that 'Opie ... weaves between Burkean and radical beliefs, not offering her readers a single, comfortable solid position.... Like much [other] writing, her text reveals her uneasiness with the masculine symbolic order.'<sup>65</sup> This observation echoes that of Gary Kelly, who earlier noted the mixed messages in Opie's work, 'incorporating criticism, but reaffirming social institutions'.<sup>66</sup> While she does not take the opportunity for an overt individual response to this situation which is in any way indicative of her radical past, she has good reason not to do this, given the conservatism of the historical moment. But analysis of the situation she creates, and an awareness of the accuracy of the depiction of the social forces in play, enhancing the

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<sup>65</sup> Eleanor Ty, *Unsex'd Revolutionaries: Five Women Novelists of the 1790s* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1993), p.30.

<sup>66</sup> Kelly, 1981, p.5.

power of the male and diminishing the already lesser power of the female, reveals a critical gaze at work. The need for understatement in female writing is a constant motif, and particularly present in the time of editorial reaction in which Opie was publishing. 'Tell the truth,' wrote Emily Dickinson, a century later, 'but tell it slant – Success in circuit lies'.<sup>67</sup>

It may also be pointed out that Opie is never offering social or socio-political solutions, in keeping with the conventions of the novel form, which conveys its ideology through such individuated narratives. Her tales are heavily individuated and the onus is on the reader to take up the themes which form the strands of her prose fiction, incorporating them into her/his own view of the workings of society – or not to. With their emphases on individualised situations of intense emotion, the events and tensions described in her tales are remarkably consistent, having many of the characteristics of the sentimental novel of the previous generation. Kelly comments on this consistency in his discussion of *Father and Daughter*, writing:

Like many women novelists of the eighteenth century, [Opie] was interested only in situations of intense emotion, and in spite of the fact that her many volumes of tales present a fair range of [these], there is one basic situation which occurs again and again. A heroine of sensibility leaves or is banished from home, due to her own moral inadequacies or those of the home itself (a severe or profligate parent); the result of her departure is a series of scenes of remorse as the plot moves ... through these passages of penitence to a grand reconciliation.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Emily Dickinson, Poem no.1129 in Abrams et al, p.2471.

<sup>68</sup> Kelly in J.Vinson, ed., *Novelists and Prose Writers* (London: Macmillan, 1979), p.936.

Further characteristics of sentimental writing may be seen in the youth and ingenuousness of not only Agnes, but Opie's other female protagonists. As Butler comments, in discussing the sentimental writing of the 1770s, 'Heroes and heroines are employed who readily attract identification. They are often very young and inexperienced, and hence easy victims of the corrupt or designing.'<sup>69</sup> Opie's sentimental Agnes or Louisa, or even Adeline, may be contrasted with Godwin's Caleb, who resolutely applies rational principles to overcome his difficulties.<sup>70</sup> Janet Todd makes an interesting point about sentimental writing which also applies to Opie's protagonists: having indicated the philosophical roots of sensibility in the benign concepts of society of Hume, Locke, Hartley et al, 'positing innate virtues or goodness in all humanity' she goes on to point out that the sentimental protagonist generally consists of a vulnerable and susceptible individual adrift in a hostile society.<sup>71</sup> One of the fundamental tenets of narrative is that of conflict, and (notwithstanding MacKenzie's *Julia de Roubigné*, in which there are no villains) conflict arises in sentimental writing when the pure but inexperienced are thrown to the lions of self-interest and cynicism. Aside from the reassurance of a conventional style, the attractions of such a plot make it prime material for writing intended or promoted as instructive or

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<sup>69</sup> Butler, 1975, p.17.

<sup>70</sup> See William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, ed. by Maurice Hindle (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1988).

<sup>71</sup> Todd, 1986, p.94.

moralising.

Opie's treatment of time in *Father and Daughter* does not follow the chronological unfolding of the tale in which I have discussed it thus far. The following excerpt from a point well on in the chronological development of the plot forms the opening words of the tale:

The night was dark – the wind blew keenly over the frozen and rugged heath, when Agnes, pressing her moaning child to her bosom, was travelling on foot to her father's habitation. 'Would to God I had never left it!' she exclaimed, as home and all its enjoyments rose in fancy to her view. (p.1)

Opie has fractured the chronological exposition of the narrative to provide the reader with a strong opening, which is then followed by an invitation to discover by reading on how this vividly depicted situation arose. In *Father and Daughter* there are several positive attributes to the technique of framing an opening statement taken from a point later in the narrative line, particularly in enabling the reader to view the protagonist in a positive light. First, the reader is inevitably moved by the woman's struggle against the forces of Nature. Second, Agnes may be seen as a virtuous mother: she has not abandoned the child but is acting maternally, pressing him to her bosom against the wintry night. Third, there is evidence of remorse and penitence in her utterance: she wishes she had never left her father's house, and in terms of the convention of the 'perfect lady', it is clear that society feels that is where she belongs. Finally, and significantly, because the reader is not yet aware of the circumstances that lie behind the situation now to

view, it is not possible to condemn Agnes with a moral judgement. The reader is therefore drawn into the tale predisposed to sympathise, and for a female reader perhaps to empathise, with Agnes: to be able to see the tale as 'the ruin of a trusting woman by a profligate man', as Julia Kavanagh expressed it.<sup>72</sup> The attentive reader has turned the blame for Agnes's ruin and for her father's madness away from her, aware of this representation of her ingenuousness and susceptibility. Janet Todd includes the latter term in her list of characteristics of the qualities that sentimentalists ascribed to women, along with 'intuitive sympathy, emotionalism and passivity', and it will be seen how apt all four of these terms are in describing Agnes.<sup>73</sup> Again, in writing in the unfashionable but familiar style of the sentimentalists, Opie is making her text and her protagonist more accessible to the kind of reader she wishes to attract.

It may be thought that the relating of this ruin is quite enough for what is purported by its author to be merely a 'simple tale', but this is not so. Opie's principal interest in this narration is the analysis of the father/daughter relationship, particularly the expiation of the guilt the daughter feels for an act into which she was drawn by a manipulating seducer. The gender referencing is again clear: Agnes bears her child as symbolic not only of her naivety and vulnerability, but also of her sin, and therefore must feel guilt. The absent male figure is the seducer: the male figure soon to be present, her father, is the arbiter of

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<sup>72</sup> Kavanagh, p.272.

<sup>73</sup> Todd, 1986, p.110.

her guilt. An analysis of how the guilt arose, was manipulated and the nature of its trauma reveals an intriguing double-bind which goes beyond the scope of this tale to include the father-daughter relationship of Amelia Opie herself and the father to whom the work is dedicated.

In raising her, the widowed father of an only daughter, on whom he dotes, implicitly presents his daughter with two objectives, which may be described as 'I want you to be perfect' and 'I want to indulge you'. He wishes the former for two main reasons: first because he is aware of the strictures of society regarding young women, and he wants her to be acceptable and marry well and happily; and second because she reminds him of his late and beloved wife, whom he has now mythologised, and he wants his daughter to be like her. He wishes the latter for not unrelated reasons: she is the dearest 'other' to him, because she is at once his only child and his wife-substitute. Yet it will be seen that these two objectives are potentially if not actually contradictory.

He activates his first wish by giving guidance, by proscribing certain behaviours and by nurturing, being aware that because of the rigid gender roles that we have seen manifest in these times in the study of *The Dangers of Coquetry*, he is at best a poor substitute for the girl's mother, and unable to advise her in certain matters. In *Father and Daughter*, the only other female with whom Agnes comes into contact on a regular basis and in a familial setting is her nurse, a woman of lower status who would not be credible as a mother-substitute. He activates his second wish by lavishing attention on his

daughter and granting her wishes.

So it must be highly likely, due to the contradictory nature of the objectives, that for the father, his daughter will displease him: either by falling short of perfection because she has been spoilt by his indulgences, or by failing to respond to his indulgences because she is so perfect as to find them distasteful. In either case, the daughter feels guilt, for she knows that she has failed her father and his objectives. In Agnes's case it is the first. For Agnes, the guilt stems from two main causes, neither of which she is totally responsible for. One of these is real (within the scope of a work of fiction) and the other contrived by Clifford. The real cause is her present situation: it has all gone wrong for her. She is abandoned in a strange city, with a child and without support. She knows that, irrespective of fault, the world will blame her for this situation. Agnes has been carefully drawn as a young woman of lapsed virtue, as distinct from a woman of an amoral nature, and she feels shame for her lapse and the ignominy that will accrue to her, her child and her father as a result. The second, contrived cause of her guilt is the way in which Clifford convinces her that her father communicates his response to her situation by withdrawing the attention which he customarily lavishes upon her - and, further, is remarrying. The attention which had been hers will now be transferred to his new wife. Agnes has been ousted.

Such a burden of guilt is likely to be extremely traumatic, and this trauma adds to the woman's other difficulties of sustenance, isolation, estrangement by Clifford and social ostracism. Carol



Gilligan writes: 'When women feel excluded from direct participation in society, they see themselves as subject to a consensus or judgement made and enforced by the men on whose protection and support they depend and by whose names they are known.'<sup>74</sup> Towards Clifford, Agnes feels only the bitterness of disillusion, but, as she navigates the stormy heath, she fears the judgement of her father.

A detail in the characterisation of Agnes anticipates Freud's observation in 1908 of the high incidence of agoraphobia (which he also terms 'topophobia') manifest in women who have experienced the kind of trauma that she has done, namely Opie's depiction of Agnes's state of distress in the opening lines of the tale.<sup>75</sup> The psychology of a century later therefore endorses the accuracy of Opie's description of Agnes's state of distress: the journey across the heath was more terrible for her than for a healthy woman. It is clear that a close and accurate observation of disturbed behaviour is at work here. This interest in mental disturbance was not uncommon at the time, particularly among Dissenting thinkers, who attempted to apply rational principles to the treatment of the mentally ill.<sup>76</sup> The first such asylum in England, the Retreat at York, was opened by the Quakers in 1796. Visiting an asylum was considered an instructive amusement. This interest was evident in Opie from an early age, when, as she recorded in her now-

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<sup>74</sup> Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982) pp.44-45.

<sup>75</sup> See Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1929), p.129.

<sup>76</sup> See, e.g., P. Nolan, *A History of Mental Health Nursing* (London: Chapman Hall, 1993), p.74.

missing journal, she would often look at the inmates through the iron gates of the Norwich asylum. Brightwell quotes from the journal how one of the inmates, a man with 'a look full of mournful expression' was the model for the demented father in her tale.<sup>77</sup> Her interest also prefigures her later work in prison with Fry and her plans for hospital reform.<sup>78</sup>

Further evidence of Opie's fascination with mental instability is evident in the encounter Agnes has with an escaped maniac, his chains rattling around him, as she crosses the frozen heath at night. The madman lurches out of the darkness towards her urging her to destroy her child. Fearful for its safety, she hides. It is only with the light of dawn that she recognises the terrible, deranged figure as that of her father. Far from being remarried, as Clifford would have had her believe, she now realises that he has not communicated with her because her elopement has driven him mad. Synchronous with, and dependent from, her ruin in the sexual and social sense is his ruin in the world of business and in his health. He is confined in an asylum which, ironically, in happier days, he had helped to found. Her discovery of her father's situation is indeed a doubling of the burden of guilt for a daughter who loves her father and is desperately hoping for his forgiveness.

From the point of view of a dramatic analysis, it appears that the agons of Agnes are at their most intense at this point of

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<sup>77</sup> Brightwell. p.17.

<sup>78</sup> see for example, Amelia Opie to Robert Southey dd. 13 January 1830; Stanger Collection 2/100.5, Wordsworth Trust, Grasmere.

dénouement. Her fortunes are clearly at their nadir. Curiously, Mrs Kavanagh, writing in 1863, finds that 'This dramatic part of the story is by no means the best. It is too violent to be tender or touching.'<sup>79</sup>

Perhaps she is anticipating the remarks of Ada Earland in 1911, regarding the tale's loss of interest for later readers, or perhaps she is reflecting a mid-Victorian distaste for anything forcefully stated.

Kavanagh, however, is apt to assess Opie in terms of her 'sweetness', as we have seen. By contrast, to the eyes of this reader at the end of the twentieth century, this part of the tale has an admirable strength and directness that communicates the pathos of the situation very clearly.

Julia Kavanagh prefers the following episode, after Agnes has been rescued by cottagers, herself and her child restored to life after her suicide attempt, and both have found respite with her old nurse, Fanny, in her native town. As Kavanagh contentedly points out:

Scorn and contumely leave her not unmoved indeed, but find her resigned and penitent. The stings of her own conscience are keener than man's most bitter reproaches; and the thought of her father in a madhouse, and there through her guilt, teaches her how to bear the world's severity. The dignity she displays in her humbled state, her quiet pride and independence in supporting herself and her child, and, above all, her passionate, unwearied hope that her sight and presence will ultimately restore her father to reason, are eminently touching.<sup>80</sup>

It will be seen that Kavanagh prefers the modest rehabilitation which Agnes performs under trying conditions, in order to reconstruct her

<sup>79</sup> Kavanagh, p.273.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p.274.

good name, although she makes no bones about according 'guilt' to Agnes for her actions, as distinct from, perhaps, 'folly'. This seems thoroughly Victorian, in the sense of the pursuit of virtue through modesty and industry being its own reward.

Agnes's father is confined for five years in the asylum, then pronounced incurable and sent home. 'The great interest of his tale now hangs on his cure', writes Kavanagh. 'Will she achieve it or not? She watches by him, anxious, vigilant, and is rewarded with the fruit of all her toil: her father, wakening from a long sleep, recognises and forgives her, then dies.'<sup>81</sup> But the strain of guilt, remorse and vigilance overtakes her:

That blessing, the hope of obtaining which alone gave Agnes courage to endure contumely, poverty, fatigue and sorrow, was for one moment her own, and then snatched from her for ever. No wonder then, that when convinced her father was really dead she fell into a state of stupefaction from which she never recovered; and at the same time were borne to the same grave the father and daughter. (p.189)

'Here so beautiful and simple a story should have ended. What more do we want to learn?' asks Kavanagh, not unreasonably.<sup>82</sup> The conventional operation of climax predisposes us to finality. For some reason, despite her grasp of dramatic convention, Opie pens a further episode which treats the happy survival of Edward, the child, snatched up by the odious Clifford, who is now respectably married to Caroline, and who rears the boy in opulence. This is curiously similar to an

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., p.275.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

alternative ending put forward for Richardson's *Clarissa*, in which Lovelace repents his foul deed and after Clarissa's death passes the rest of his sorry, short life in repentance.<sup>83</sup> The important thing in writing fiction, and which Opie might have learned from watching her husband paint, is knowing when to stop. Edward, the son of Agnes and Clifford, under the influence of his amoral father, is unlikely to be a figure of interest or approval, and his fate is certainly beyond the ambit of the tale.

Once more, as with *The Dangers of Coquetry*, it seems that Opie's tale is based on a dreadful projection of herself when younger – a projection which tests the father/daughter relationship in fiction in ways which would be devastating in real life. As with Louisa's tale, *Father and Daughter* is that of a protagonist who has a certain characteristic to excess: a heroic flaw, which results in a particular nemesis. The flaw is mitigated in both of Opie's heroines by virtue – daughterly and maternal care in Agnes and pity in Louisa – but neither virtue is sufficient to prevent the awful climax.

As I have demonstrated, there are narrative themes, situations and similarities in style in *Father and Daughter* which recall Opie's earlier work, *The Dangers of Coquetry*, and also anticipate her masterpiece, *Adeline Mowbray*, to be published four years later. Within the narrative, these include: the motherlessness of the protagonist; a clear depiction of the dangers inherent in a young woman defying conventional mores; the wielding of male power, with

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<sup>83</sup> Lady Echlin, *An Alternative Ending to Richardson's Clarissa* (Bern: Franke Verlag, 1982).

or without the morality to which such power should ascribe; the powerlessness of the female, within or without the circle of conventional behaviour; the transference of guilt from male to female as a feature of the male hegemony; the relationships of class or rank, with not only the class niche of the main characters very well defined but also Opie's portrayal of the deserving poor who are at the mercy of the higher ranks in so much of life (cf. Fielding's *Amelia*) and yet who are able to succour the outcast *bourgeoise*; the depiction of an intricate pattern of loyalties and friendships. For the telling of the tale, the reader may note a strong, straightforward style which helps to propel the narrative; a brisk pace; an effective use of foils and pairings in the handling of the characters; the use of pathetic fallacy and signals of darkness to promote the effectiveness of the image; a well-manipulated plot development, especially as regards transitions from chapter to chapter and volume to volume; the sense of an ineluctable progress to an inevitable conclusion. At a time when the reaction against sentimental narrative had already taken place, this is an emphatically sentimental tale. Opie is aiming for her reader to become emotionally involved very quickly, and for a state of emotional catharsis by the climax of the tale. If the principles of the radical novel are 'its resolute rationality, its suspicion of the uncontrollable workings of the unconscious mind', as Butler puts it, they are certainly not present here.<sup>84</sup> This is a narrative which, although written by a woman who had earlier aligned herself with radicalism and Jacobinism in a very

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<sup>84</sup> Butler, 1975, pp.32-33.

vigorous manner, harks back to the sentimental styles of discourse of the 1760s, in terms of both its fragmentation of narrative and the 'new awareness of the subjective life of the individual'.<sup>85</sup> As such, it not only reflects the taste of the time, which, as we have seen, was away from the kind of radicalism of Godwin, Wollstonecraft and Hays, it also looks forward to some degree to the social realism of the early nineteenth-century novelists for its treatment of mores and values running through the fabric of society at that time, not least as regards mental illness.

Opie need not have worried about the reception her new tale would receive: *Father and Daughter* was a triumph and the subject of both critical and private acclaim. Mary Tevis notes that unlike *The Dangers of Coquetry*, which attracted almost no attention ... *Father and Daughter* was heartily received by the public, who warmly approved the tale.<sup>86</sup> Kavanagh describes the work as 'a beautiful and pathetic tale, which had rapid and genuine success.'<sup>87</sup> MacGregor notes how 'The reading public applauded the pathos of this tale, and were moved to tears when Agnes' seduction brought about her father's insanity and her own death.'<sup>88</sup>

Although these later critics are consistent in claiming that the book was an immediate success, contemporary reviews were in fact

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Tevis, p.23.

<sup>87</sup> Kavanagh, p.250.

<sup>88</sup> McGregor, p.32.

varied. Dr. Brown, in the *Edinburgh Review*, noted the interest generated by the work, but perceptively felt that

the merit of the novel does not consist in its action, nor in any varied exhibition of character. Agnes, in all the sad changes of fortune, is still the same; and the action, if we except a very few situations of the highest excitement, is the common history of every seduction in romance.<sup>89</sup>

The reviewer of *The Monthly Review* focussed on the tale's pathos, confessing to being personally affected by the tale but expressing consolation which 'under the first impression of our feelings, arose from the hope and persuasion that the story is not founded on *Fact*.'<sup>90</sup>

The *Critical Review*, in line with its customary conservative stance, was alert to the moral of the tale, which was found to be

... seriously impressive. It exhibits in the most affecting point of view the misery consequent upon the illicit indulgence of the passions; and the effect of the awful lesson which it teaches is not impaired by any intermixture of levity of dialogue or pruriency of description.<sup>91</sup>

The reviewer then addresses Amelia Opie's writing style, which is found to be 'elegant and correct, free from ambitious ornament, and never degenerating into colloquial negligence.'<sup>92</sup>

MacGregor describes how the reviewer of *The Monthly Magazine* 'shed tears' and notes that *The European Magazine* gave the

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<sup>89</sup> *The Edinburgh Review*, 1 (1802) p.115.

<sup>90</sup> *The Monthly Review*, 35 (1801), pp.163-164.

<sup>91</sup> *The Critical Review*, 35 (1802), pp. 114-117.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*.



tale a brief mention.<sup>93</sup> The tears however, were considerably delayed, since the work was not reviewed in that periodical until 1820, when it went into a third edition. The reviewer of *The European Magazine* noted the universal appeal of *Father and Daughter*. 'The incidents, which are of a domestic nature, occur naturally, and come home to ... every class of readers.' As with the other reviews, the 'force and effect' with which certain scenes are written was praised, 'and the lessons which she inculcates do credit to her head and heart.'<sup>94</sup> The reviewers at *The Critical Review* and the *European Magazine* were thus the first to foreground the moral aspects of Opie's tales, a characteristic of her writing which was to become more evident as she became older.

The emphasis placed by later biographers and critics - all of whom, apart from MacGregor, cite the same source, namely, Brightwell - is on the reactions expressed by private readers, rather than critics. Some of these were notable figures. MacGregor, Tevis and Kavanagh all agree that, as MacGregor expresses it, 'Sir Walter Scott wept as he read'.<sup>95</sup> MacGregor also quotes the first verse of an eighteen-stanza poem written, as far as can be ascertained, anonymously, and sent to Amelia Opie 'in praise of the tale which made [the writer] and his Fanny weep.'<sup>96</sup> Further, 'Even the matter-of-

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<sup>93</sup> MacGregor, p.35.

<sup>94</sup> *The European Magazine*, 1 (1801), p.262.

<sup>95</sup> MacGregor, p.32.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p.35.

fact Thomas Robinson, the brother of Henry Crabb Robinson, was affected'. The excerpt she quotes reveals that this is a misattribution, for the phrase actually occurs in a letter from Henry to Thomas dated 31<sup>st</sup> July 1801.<sup>97</sup> He writes:

It is quite enough for me to say that [*Father and Daughter*] interested me and I was pleased to find that I have a few strings about my heart which are capable of receiving a vibration of sympathy. ... The story is very simple and the distress of it arises from seduction.

This reference to the tale's sexual mores leads him to consider Opie's position as a writer of such tales, contrasting her with her recent mentor and friend Godwin. He considers that she supported a 'middle opinion betwixt the free notions of Godwin on female chastity on the one hand and the puritanical and prudish doctrine of Miss Hannah More on the other'.<sup>98</sup> It was therefore evident to a perceptive contemporary critic such as Robinson that Opie has distanced herself from the more extreme opinions of the 1790s with which she had colluded, if not actually propounded. Just prior to publication she had felt apprehensive about the reception her work would receive, but in a letter to Robert Garnham written at that time, she states that she had 'felt the pulse of the public and [found] that it beat kindly enough towards me.'<sup>99</sup> Taken in the context of the rest of the letter to Garnham, which was political in tone, the contradiction surrounding

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<sup>97</sup> Henry Crabb Robinson to Tom Robinson, 31 July 1801; Crabb Robinson Collection, Dr Williams's Library, London, 30/1/41.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Opie to Robert Garnham, 1801; Crabb Robinson Collection.

Amelia Opie that was to continue throughout her life in one form or another becomes evident. Because she wrote (and probably spoke) in ways and about themes which she felt her audience wanted to read, with the appropriate political and social bias, she nowadays seems elusive, if not pusillanimous. At once outspoken and engaging in manner, she is also vacillatory in content. One contemporary who was decidedly unimpressed was Cecilia Clarkson, who wrote, also to Garnham, that she had received

a long letter from Mrs. Opie. I learn that she is amazingly noticed and courted by titl[ed f]olk & learned folk & rich folk & all sort of fol[k] ... I do not enjoy her. Her Book has been amazingly successful which I consider as rather a misfortune than otherwise – it will encourage her to scribble on and I am almost certain that she will never produce anything better.<sup>100</sup>

Ada Earland, writing in 1911, discusses reaction to the tale, contrasting its success at the time with its obscurity a hundred years later:

Perhaps in some forgotten corner of an old library, or stowed away in lumber rooms, copies of *Father and Daughter*, over which Sir Walter Scott cried; after reading which Prince Hoare could not sleep all night ‘it made him so wretched’; may yet be found, yet if so, it is doubtful if the finder could, reading it, squeeze a single tear. Are we harder-hearted than our great-grandfathers, or does the keynote of sentiment change with each generation? Its success for a while was immense. It ran through a dozen editions, the last in 1844 [the publishers record only nine]. To a modern reader the pathos is overdone; the characters lack individuality. Mrs Opie was deficient in literary style, and interrupted the action of her story with banal didactic attempts to point the moral or pile on the pathos. But in an age when novels and plays were

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<sup>100</sup> Mrs Clarkson to Robert Garnham dd. 20 May 1802; Crabb Robinson Collection.

coarse, she wrote purely, and Miss Lydia Languish would have had no need to push *Father and Daughter* under the sofa cushion when visitors were announced.<sup>101</sup>

Earland, like Kavanagh, draws attention to the shortfalls of Opie's tale, but finds mitigation in her purity. By today's standards, Opie writes a strong tale, told at a good pace and certain to provoke an emotional response. One is reminded of her disarming introduction on the title page of *Father and Daughter*, that the work is but 'A simple moral tale'. It may not be of the highest canon of literature, but it was long in the publisher's lists. MacGregor notes that 'at the time of her death [1853] it was still considered her best work.'<sup>102</sup> Its success can be gauged from the financial consequences. At this time Janet Todd estimates that 'to keep herself respectably ... an indifferently successful woman novelist would have had to produce as many as ten books a year'.<sup>103</sup> However, Jan Fergus and Janice Thaddeus estimate that Opie earned five hundred pounds a year from her writing.<sup>104</sup> Her ability to do so was due to the success of *Father and Daughter*, selling an estimated 6750 copies and paving the way for subsequent publications.<sup>105</sup> *Father and Daughter* also stimulated several spin-off publications, notably Ferdinando Paër's opera *Agnese* (1809), which,

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<sup>101</sup> Earland, p.157.

<sup>102</sup> MacGregor, p.35.

<sup>103</sup> Janet Todd, *The Sign of Angellica: Women, Writing and Fiction 1600 – 1800* (London: Virago, 1989), p.220.

<sup>104</sup> Jan Fergus and Janice Thaddeus, 'Women, Publishers and Money' in *Studies in Eighteenth Century Culture*, 17 (1987), p.200.

<sup>105</sup> See Appendix B: Publication Data of Opie's Works Published by Longman's, p.340 below.

although it is not recorded in Grove as being based on Opie's tale, nevertheless has a heroine named Agnese de Fitzhendry and a very similar plotline.<sup>106</sup>

*Father and Daughter* and the collection of *Poems* published the following year established Mrs. Opie as a fashionable writer in the sentimental style. Her next work of fiction, however, *Adeline Mowbray* (1805), was to show a considerable development in terms of both complexity of structure and seriousness of purpose.



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<sup>106</sup> See *New Grove Dictionary of Opera* ed. by Stanley Sadie (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 4 vols.; 1, p.35 and 3, p.818.

## CHAPTER 4

The London Years: *Adeline Mowbray* (1805)

When Amelia Opie produced *Adeline Mowbray* in 1805, there is considerable evidence that she intended the work to be regarded as more than just a simple 'moral tale' – the phrase which had prefaced *Father and Daughter*. Although the words 'A Tale' appear on the title pages of each of the three volumes, it appears that she intended to construct a fully-developed novel, contradicting the disarming statement she had made previously in her efforts to avoid the use of the word 'novel' in describing her earlier prose fiction. In terms of its complexity, length and characterisation, *Adeline Mowbray* is unquestionably a novel, at least as we use the term nowadays.

One of these indicators of difference is the length, at approximately 118,500 words, set out in chapters of much greater length and development than either of her earlier prose works, and all bound into three duodecimo volumes, resulting in a work half as long again as her earlier tales. As might be expected from the success of her earlier attributed works, she retained the status of the same London publisher, Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme. A further connection with her earlier tale *Father and Daughter* is made in the subtitle of the new work: *Mother and Daughter*. This phrase signals a statement about structure which should inform critical analysis of the novel, but which

has been passed over by most critics until Eleanor Ty in her recent publication.<sup>1</sup>

An indicator of Opie's confidence in handling prose fiction is the elaborate relationship she sets up between the swelling population of characters, with principal characters numbering seven significantly different males and five equally contrasting females. In her earlier tales, she had used the dramatic device of contrasting pairs, but, as we shall see, the relationships and characteristics in *Adeline Mowbray* are much more intricate. Further, the manipulations of male and female characters do more than assist the vehicle of the narrative on its way: they interact with each other in a world of male dominance presented from a female writer's point of view – and yet the novel confounds those critics who wish to classify it as either Jacobin or conservative. As Claudia Johnson says, '*Adeline Mowbray* invalidates all the answers, conservative or radical.'<sup>2</sup> Not only are issues of marriage problematised, as might be appropriate for a radical work of fiction, but also those of child-rearing. Additionally the reconciliation of how life should be with how it really is are investigated. However, for the answers to be so invalid suggests that the wrong questions are being asked. Part of the purpose of this inquiry into Opie's problematical novel is to seek to ask the right questions, based on a different structural model than that adopted in the past.

There is a substantial element of betrayal of women by men in

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<sup>1</sup> See Ty, 1998, esp. p.148-149.

<sup>2</sup> Johnson, p.22.

the novel, and the consequent actions of female characters to come to terms with these betrayals. As the narrative unfolds, the reader is aware of what Kathryn Sutherland, in her essay 'Hannah More's Counter-Revolutionary Feminism' has identified as

the radical male public betrayal of women, and the sense that, in their turn, women of all political persuasions were engaged in fashioning from the rhetoric of popular democracy a discourse appropriate to their peculiar needs as women.<sup>3</sup>

This statement indicates the breadth and complexity of the cultural and ideological pattern of society of the time, and the diversity of women writers' responses to it. The 'needs as women' that Opie chooses to depict in the novel are at once personal and social, radical and conservative. They drive the novel and in their different ways and situations act centripetally to resolve the struggle of women to reconcile what the male-ordered world deems an acceptable role with their own moral values and sense of the pragmatic. As for the world outside the novel, the needs of the women authors varied according to individual circumstances and motivations. It is therefore reasonable to see women writers presenting illustrations of these needs and solutions to (or at least consequences of) them in many different ways.

The eponymous character herself, raised in 'an old family mansion' is drawn from a social rank superior to that of Agnes (*Father*

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<sup>3</sup> Kathryn Sutherland, 'Hannah More's Counter-Revolutionary Feminism' in Kelvin Everest, ed., *Revolution in Writing: British Literary Responses to the French Revolution* (Milton Keynes: OU Press, 1991), p.35.



*and Daughter*) or Louisa (*The Dangers of Coquetry*).<sup>4</sup> She has features about her which, rather than make her a universal model of a young *bourgeoise* to which many young women in that social niche could easily relate, give Adeline a special singularity. The most evident of these features is a scale of values regarding marriage inculcated by her dysfunctional mother, widowed at age thirty when Adeline was ten. The incidence of mother-daughter relationships in the novels written by women in the late eighteenth/early nineteenth centuries has been remarked as 'universally high' by Eleanor Ty, at once indicating its significance at the time and its appropriateness as an avenue of study in our time.<sup>5</sup> Conversely, both Agnes and Louisa, the heroines of Opie's earlier tales, were motherless, like other heroines of popular novels of the time such as Fanny Burney's *Evelina* and *Cecilia*, and therefore lacking in instruction in the ways of the world. However, Adeline's mother is quickly demonstrated to be an egotist, who considered 'it as the chief duty of all who approached her, to study the gratification of her whims and caprices' (p.3). This device of the mother who makes a negative contribution to her daughter's upbringing propels the central issue throughout the entire novel: instead of lacking moral and worldly instruction due to motherlessness, Adeline would grow up hostage to a thoroughly unconventional set of values propounded by her mother, especially as they relate to marriage. This

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<sup>4</sup> Opie, *Adeline Mowbray*, ed. by Shelley King and John B. Pierce (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1999), p.1. Subsequent quotations are from this edition except where noted otherwise, and page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

<sup>5</sup> Mary Hays, *The Victim of Prejudice*, ed. by Eleanor Ty (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 1992), p.xii.

situation arises because of her mother's intellectual fascination with the writings of a young radical philosopher, Frederic Glenmurray, 'over whose works they [Mrs. Mowbray and Adeline] had long delighted to meditate, and who had completely led their imagination captive' (p.20).

Jonathan Wordsworth, in his introduction to the facsimile edition of this novel, calls it 'a study of moral duty'.<sup>6</sup> This is a case of critical reserve, however: it seems to me to be a study of moral confusion. The rational realm of the philosopher comes into contact with the mores and conventions of everyday life, and Adeline is caught at this interface. The novel explores areas of public and private relationships at the heart of society: those relating to love, marriage and reputation. The public condemnation of the happy relationship of Adeline and Glenmurray contrasts nicely with the public approval of the miserable marriage to Berrendale.

There are several similarities with Amelia Opie's experience of her relationship with both William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. It has become accepted that the novel is based on their efforts to avoid the tyranny of marriage, their eventual capitulation and the public obloquy that resulted from their action. This assumption needs to be questioned, however, for Opie gave no indication in any of her letters or other surviving documents that the tale was to be seen as a *roman à clef* in this way. The present-day reader may therefore either approach it as a work of fiction for its own sake, as it were, or attempt to read

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<sup>6</sup> Opie, *Adeline Mowbray*, 1995 edn., unpaginated.

into it figures from real life.

The critical response has been usually the latter option. Recent developments, however, signal a re-evaluation towards a more open view. For example, in 1992, Ty stated unequivocally that the work is 'based on the life of Mary Wollstonecraft'.<sup>7</sup> Her more recent publication is more tentative: she writes that Adeline 'is the character supposedly modelled on Wollstonecraft'.<sup>8</sup> Equally, as we move backwards in time, the connection appears less certain. In 1910, Clara Whitmore opined that 'The life story of Mary Wollstonecraft suggested [the novel] to Amelia Opie.'<sup>9</sup> In 1863 Julia Kavanagh made a more tenuous connection, evidently anxious to protect the subject of her essay, Opie, from too close a contagion with Wollstonecraft, in a manner which indicates forcefully how the odium surrounding Wollstonecraft was still present mid-nineteenth century:

Mrs Opie knew Godwin before he married Mary Wolstonecraft [*sic*], and if she did not know that erring woman, she was well-acquainted with her history. It suggested the chief incidents in the tale of *Adeline Mowbray*, and it is well for Mrs Opie's credit that she did not invent them herself, for they are so remote from the common realities of life that, had not the whole world known them to be true, few would have tolerated them.<sup>10</sup>

At the time of the novel's publication, the connection between Adeline and Wollstonecraft was neither admitted by Opie nor made evident in

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<sup>7</sup> Ty, 1992, p.28.

<sup>8</sup> Ty, 1998, p.153.

<sup>9</sup> Whitmore, p.151.

<sup>10</sup> Julia Kavanagh, p.277.

the critical reviews of the time of the novel's publication.

Much of the confusion arises, it seems to me, because twentieth-century critics have approached Opie *via* Wollstonecraft, with the consequence that *Adeline Mowbray* is perceived only as a construction based on Wollstonecraft and Godwin. This situation seems to have arisen because of Wollstonecraft's relatively greater importance in the eyes of the twentieth-century critics. At the time, however, and for much of the nineteenth century, as Kavanagh's comment tellingly reveals, Wollstonecraft was not as highly-regarded a figure as she is today.

I suggest a fresh analysis based not on Godwin as Glenmurray and Wollstonecraft as Adeline, but the more satisfying triangular structure of Godwin as Glenmurray, Wollstonecraft as Editha, Adeline's mother, and for Adeline herself the same kind of inverted projection of Opie herself that was observed in her two previous tales. Strong narratives, as Opie knew, require triangular structures. All three prose works that have been considered so far have such structures: in *The Dangers of Coquetry*, Louisa, Mortimer and Lady Belmour; in *Father and Daughter*, Agnes, Clifford and her father; in *Adeline Mowbray*, Adeline, Glenmurray and Editha. Berrendale, Langley, O'Carrol, Mary Warner and similar characters, conversely, amply illustrate the gulf between what is and what should be.

Opie takes such care and writes at such length in developing the character of Mrs. Mowbray, Adeline's mother, that the reader might at first think that the novel will be about her. The significance of this

careful construction is largely lost if the critical analysis is that of a bipolar structure, Glenmurray and Adeline. It is important to realise the significance of the mother figure in Adeline's eyes. Ty suggests that Editha becomes a 'lost object of desire' for Adeline in a way not dissimilar to Agnes's father in *Father and Daughter*.<sup>11</sup>

Mrs. Mowbray's character has two main strands which are constant through the work. The first of these is her egotism, which is repeatedly emphasised in the text: 'Mrs. Mowbray, as I have said before, was the spoiled child of rich parents' (p.9); 'Mrs. Mowbray was, if I may be allowed the expression, a showing-off woman, and loved the information which she acquired' (p.15). The other main strand is her fascination with dogma and imposing it on others. She 'imagined systems for the good of society and the furtherance of general philanthropy', but at the same time neglected those around her (p.5). The similarity to Wollstonecraft, a woman who had written two seminal works on what were then regarded as idealistic and revolutionary views of human relationships, and yet had been unable to sustain her own relationships, cannot be ignored. As a child Editha had read Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). She then set to teaching her parents how to think, in an inversion of the customary parent-child relationship that signals not only her egotism but the judgemental view of her parents that Wollstonecraft had achieved by her mid-teens (p.12).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Ty, 1998, p.147.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Tomalin, p.23.

That Opie used Wollstonecraft as a model for Editha can be supported by an analysis of the social situation in which the two operated. As Amelia Alderson, Opie had known Godwin for several years, having first met him through her father's acquaintanceship with Thomas Holcroft. Godwin's first known communication with Amelia Opie was to respond to sight of the manuscript of *Adelaide* in 1794. Her earlier letters to him, particularly that of 28 August 1795, are girlish and flattering. Her journal entries, notably that which describes her first visit to his house and that which describes an incident with a slipper, reveal an amused sexual tension between them.<sup>13</sup> The coterie had stabilised around Amelia Opie, Godwin, Inchbald and Holcroft until Wollstonecraft, ten years older than Opie and a woman of considerable interest to her for her writings, became involved with Godwin in August 1796. A letter from Opie to Godwin dated 17 August 1796 first mentions Wollstonecraft ('Mrs Imlay'), and hints at Wollstonecraft's dogmatic nature, stating that she found Wollstonecraft a much more rigid critic of her play manuscript than Godwin had been.<sup>14</sup> This is the first mention of the fascination Wollstonecraft had for Opie which both attracted her and which she found so difficult to deal with. In reading the three extant letters from Opie to Wollstonecraft, one is struck by the range of emotions she expresses, from the simpering tone of that of 28 August, with expressions of awestruck affection such as 'I derive so much pleasure

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<sup>13</sup> Brightwell, pp. 41-42 and pp.56-57.

<sup>14</sup> Amelia Alderson to William Godwin, 17 August 1796: Bodleian Library, Oxford, B.Dep.6, 210/6.

from thinking of you,' and the hurt defensiveness of that of 18 December, when a plan of Opie's to raise money for Wollstonecraft was snubbed by her, to the coolness of the letter written after the marriage of Wollstonecraft and Godwin four months later.<sup>15</sup> Opie clearly found the intellectual climate of the coterie stimulating – her letter to Godwin of 28 August 1795 refers to his 'new ideas' she had to take on.<sup>16</sup> It was also animated: in November 1796, she remonstrates with him for calling her 'coquette' and 'bitch'.<sup>17</sup> Wollstonecraft played her part in this interchange: Tomalin notes the 'arch references' to both Opie and Inchbald in her letters to Godwin at this time as she destabilised the coterie.<sup>18</sup> In a retrospect of seven or eight years from the time of writing the novel, Wollstonecraft must have appeared sufficiently complex, egotistical and caught up in the inconsistencies of reality and idealistic philosophy to make a rich source for Opie's character of Editha Mowbray.

Editha Mowbray is thus a central figure, and the development of her character focuses on the way her fascination with philosophy works counter to her upbringing of her daughter. Rather than providing an educational framework for the girl, on which might be developed a viable understanding and awareness of life, mores and

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<sup>15</sup> Amelia Alderson to Mrs Imlay, 28 August 1796; Alderson to Imlay, 18 December 1796; both Bodleian B.Dep. 6, 210/6 and Alderson to Mrs Godwin, n.d., Bodleian, B.Dep.C, 507/15.

<sup>16</sup> Alderson to Godwin, 28 August 1795; Bodleian, B.Dep.210/6.

<sup>17</sup> Alderson to Godwin, 1 November 1796; Bodleian, B Dep.6 210/6.

<sup>18</sup> Tomalin, p.258.

morals, the philosophical theories that fascinate Mrs. Mowbray are seen by her as ends in themselves, and so she consistently fails to carry the abstraction through to a practical implementation. When Adeline attempts to make this logical step, she is shocked and dumbfounded. Later in the tale, this trait will be reversed, and it becomes Adeline who cannot see the practical consequences of her philosophic action of living with Glenmurray, to her mother's horror. Putting across the point of Mrs Mowbray's cerebrally-based parenting, Opie writes how 'After having overnight arranged the tasks for Adeline for the next day, lost in some new speculations for the good of her child, she would lie in bed all the morning, exposing that child to the dangers of idleness' (p.6). Julia Kavanagh's observation of this trait reveals a splendidly nineteenth-century gloss:

Mrs. Mowbray ... is so wrapped up in the educational plans for her only child, Adeline, that the young girl grows up nearly self-educated, and though endowed with the purest and most refined impulses, a great deal too self-reliant. New theories of moral and social duties are amongst Mrs. Mowbray's weaknesses, but she stops at theory, and Adeline, ingenuous, conscientious and inexperienced, ventures on practice.<sup>19</sup>

The last few words of Kavanagh's comment are brought into sharp focus when Mrs. Mowbray, who has been 'inventing an easy method of learning arithmetic, by which I [Mrs Mowbray] was going to teach her [Adeline] in a few months,' discovers that Adeline, self-taught, is already been handling the family accounts while her mother, too lofty to deal with such practicalities, conjures her schemes (p.10). As well

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<sup>19</sup> Kavanagh, p.277.



as illustrating the discrepancy between theory and practice, there is a clear literary relationship here with the *Trista-paedia* written by Walter Shandy, an educational treatise which will form the basis of the education of his son Tristram, of which the latter says: 'My father spun his [book], every thread of it, out of his own brain, – or reeled and cross-twisted what all other spinners and spinsters had spun before him.'<sup>20</sup> Indeed, one of Sterne's main themes in this novel – the association of ideas as cause of folly and peril – may be seen as significant in *Adeline Mowbray*, but in reverse: it is the disassociation of abstract truth from the processes of real life which Adeline fails to make which accounts for the novel's central agon. We know that Opie was familiar with Sterne's *Tristram Shandy* (1759-1767), since Glenmurray refers to 'Sterne's dear Jenny' (p.141). However, there is no evidence of an intentional literary connection between Opie's writing and Sterne's. Neither the novel nor its writer are mentioned in the biographies of Opie or in her letters.

The choice of arithmetical skills on which this incident is based is highly topical for the time. Edward Copeland, in discussing the significance of this skill, points out how important it was for a middle-rank woman's well-being to be able to calculate her 'competence' – that amount of money that will enable her to live independently, without the need to work – and review her prospects of achieving it.

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<sup>20</sup> Lawrence Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (London: Penguin, 1985), p.25.

This preoccupation highlights the precarious state women were in without such a competence, and the heroine of Opie's novel was to serve as a salutary example of a woman in such a state, dependent on either the generosity or otherwise of her partner or her own earning powers for her support. Copeland comments:

In contemporary women's fiction, the competence ledgers are kept meticulously clean, neat and well-balanced. No matter what the scenery or the philosophy, the main plot or the subplots, the sound of adding and subtraction makes its way to the surface.<sup>21</sup>

Copeland continues by quoting from a tract by Jane West, a writer seen as holding the very conservative views prevalent at the time. Writing in 1806, West states:

Every girl ought to possess a competent knowledge of arithmetic. It is also desirable that this knowledge ought to be practical as well as theoretical; that she should understand the value of commodities, be able to calculate expenses, and to tell what a specific income should afford.<sup>22</sup>

Adeline's failing is that although she is able to demonstrate computational skills in her childhood, she loses sight of their objective in later life. This may be read as Opie's satirizing such pecuniarism as is found in Jane West's adumbrations, and is one small example of the pleasure she takes in mocking conservative ideology such as this. Love makes Adeline blind to such matters when she is with

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<sup>21</sup> Copeland, p.23.

<sup>22</sup> Jane West, *Letters to a Young Lady* (London: 1806), p.259.

Glenmurray, at least as far as can be ascertained from any textual evidence, whereas her open-hearted nature makes Berrendale's miserly and self-indulgent cruelties too hard to bear in her married life. Another opportunity for this kind of satire on parenting was on the subject of suitable clothing for children, in which incident Mrs Mowbray is seen reading aloud from a work on this debatable subject. The excerpt is worth quoting in its entirety:

'Some persons are of the opinion that thin shoes are most beneficial to health; others, equally worthy of respect, think thick ones of most use: and the reasons for these opinions we shall class under two heads.'

'Dear me, ma'am,' cried Bridget, 'and in the meantime miss Adeline will go without any shoes at all.'

'Do not interrupt me, Bridget,' cried Mrs. Mowbray, and proceeded to read on. 'In the first place it is not clear, says a learned writer, whether children require any clothing at all for their feet.'

At this moment Adeline burst open the parlour door, and, crying bitterly, held up her bleeding toes to her mother.

'Mamma, mamma!' cried she, 'you forgot to send for a pair of new shoes for me, and see how the stones in the gravel have cut me!'

This sight, this appeal, decided the question in dispute. The feet of Adeline bleeding on a new Turkey carpet proved that some clothing for the feet was necessary. (p.7)

Satire is something new in Opie's prose writing, and indicates her growing sophistication and abilities as a writer. The way in which the most obvious issues of practicality are carefully debated with neo-classical thoroughness and systemisation 'under two heads' in an effort to get back to first principles is a swipe at the philosophy of the period. The passage is reminiscent of Wollstonecraft's 'On the Lack of

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Learning' in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), which criticised women's lack of methodical enquiry due to their 'disorderly kind of education'.<sup>23</sup> It is the adoption of an extreme form of epistemological method: Mrs. Mowbray, vacillating between various educational priorities and methodologies, has presented Adeline with exactly the disorderly education which Wollstonecraft identified.

Now it was judged right that she should learn nothing, and now that she should learn every thing. Now, her graceful form and well-turned limbs were to be free from any bandage, and any clothing save where decency required, - and now they were to be tortured by stiff stays, and fettered by the stocks and the backboard.<sup>24</sup>

Non-Jacobin writers such as Maria Edgeworth also wrote on the education of girls and young women. Maria and Richard Edgeworth's scientific rationalism, taken to similar extremes, would also require such a debate as we have just seen. In *Practical Education* (1798), the Edgeworths write on the need for methodical enquiry, but temper this by adding 'yet [the pupil] must habitually feel the nice sense of propriety, which is alone the guard and charm of every feminine virtue'.<sup>25</sup> It is this sense of propriety, an awareness of the conventions of society, which Mrs Mowbray has omitted to teach to Adeline. Hannah More, in her *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1798) takes this idea further, pointing out in her opening remarks how mistaken it is to give women 'a very defective

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<sup>23</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed by Miriam Brody Kramnick (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1978), p.40.

<sup>24</sup> Opie, p.5.

<sup>25</sup> R.L. and M. Edgeworth, *Practical Education* (London: 1798), p.534.

education, and then to expect from them the most undeviating purity of conduct.'<sup>26</sup>

The character of Glenmurray is a study of a person who, having made his reputation as an *enfant terrible* in his youth with radical and skeptical pronouncements, finds that he is stuck with them. As he matures and his philosophical abstractions are tempered by life-experience, he requires, in Carlylean terms, new clothes, but there is no opportunity for *sartor resartus*. His reputation precedes him, his juvenilia achieving a permanence in the immutability of the printed medium which, as many another writer has found, can be embarrassing. One such writer was Godwin himself, who, in the preface to the second edition of *Caleb Williams* (1832), writes how in 1794, when the first edition of the novel was published – but when, at thirty-eight, he could scarcely be considered juvenile – he was 'writing of different things of obscure note, [which now] I am inclined to suppress'.<sup>27</sup> As Marilyn Butler comments, 'he no longer saw [*Caleb Williams*] as dealing with the social and public perspectives of the Enlightenment. Instead he reinterpreted his own career retrospectively in the aesthetic and private terminology of romanticism.'<sup>28</sup>

Opie reflects this shift of Godwin's ideas and a larger radical ideology in *Adeline Mowbray*. Glenmurray's ideas, which, as Mary

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<sup>26</sup> Hannah More, *Works* (London: 1830), 5, p.ix.

<sup>27</sup> William Godwin, *Caleb Williams*, ed. by Maurice Hindle (London: Penguin, 1988), p.345.

<sup>28</sup> Marilyn Butler, 'Godwin, Burke and *Caleb Williams*' in *Romanticism: A Critical Reader*, ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), p.345.

Kathryn Tevis observes, are 'representative of the whole school of radical thought', are no longer popular.<sup>29</sup> A young friend accompanying Adeline is taken aback when she greets him in the street. "My good gracious! and do you speak to him?... they say one should not notice him because he is ... I do not exactly know what, but I believe it is a French spy, or a Jesuit" (p.24). Opie again points out the conservative tenor of the times and the preoccupation with the war with France by showing Adeline's companion as being surprised by her forwardness. Unable to escape from his youthful writings, Glenmurray lapses into a defensive skepticism. "I consider myself" he used to say, "as a sceptic, not as a man really certain of the truth of any thing which he advances" (p.20). Opie shows this pusillanimity in tragi-comic form when, having fulminated against duelling in his writings, subsequently he feels obliged to duel with the opportunistic rake O'Carrol who has debased Adeline, with whom Glenmurray is now in love. As the two men argue over issues of marriage and 'honour' as relating to Adeline and her virtue, and as she interposes her naive remarks, O'Carrol threatens a duel. Adeline quickly points out to O'Carrol the futility of his gesture: 'Why, you do not mean to challenge him? You can't suppose Mr Glenmurray would do so absurd a thing as to fight a duel? Sir, he has written a volume to prove the absurdity of the custom' (p.29). This may be seen as a direct reference to Godwin's *Political Justice*, in which he denounces the

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<sup>29</sup> Tevis, p.39.

practice of duelling.<sup>30</sup> For his part, Glenmurray feels the conflict between abstract reason and individualised emotion: 'To fight a duel would be, as Adeline observed, contrary to his principles; and to decline one, irritated as he was against Sir Patrick, was repugnant to his feelings' (p.30). The duel is fought, and both men are wounded. Thus Opie nicely demonstrates the flaw in Glenmurray's character: the dissonance between a radical philosophy, which understandably views duelling as barbaric, and the actuality of conventional behaviour – in this case the code of honour existing at that time.

There is a further and seemingly very deliberate connection between *Adeline Mowbray*, Godwin and Godwin's *Caleb Williams*. In describing Adeline's reflecting on a conversation between herself and Glenmurray relating to the social implications of their non-married relationship, Opie has Adeline refer to 'things as they are', the original title, later the subtitle of Godwin's novel. The connection between Glenmurray and Godwin becomes reinforced. At this point, Adeline is less than satisfied with Glenmurray's conduct, to which she, in her constancy to his ideals, attributes his willingness to climb down from the lofty purity of his philosophical position in order to deal with pragmatic issues of acceptability in the social world – a central theme of the novel. For Godwin, the phrase is an important one, set against its counterpoint, 'things as they ought to be', and here again we see this fundamental dichotomy between the ideal and the actual. In *Caleb Williams*, it is the status quo, 'things as they are', the British social

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<sup>30</sup> Godwin, *Political Justice*, pp.94-96.

system which is at the heart of Caleb's fears, that overruling force which, as Maggie Kilgour points out, 'through a variety of insidious means, destroys the naturally good individual.'<sup>31</sup> Adeline is destroyed by her failure to distinguish between 'the world as it is' and 'the world as it ought to be'.

Opie's work is clearly concerned with the destruction of the naturally good individual in the person of Adeline, and her deliberate use of Godwin's phrase strengthens the connection between Godwin and Glenmurray. Earlier in her work, Kilgour, in discussing *Caleb Williams* and Godwin's ideas on education, describes a central antagonism which also relates to Opie's novel:

While he [Godwin] insists on our essential autonomy, he also claims that people are not the true authors of their actions, as they are caught in a deterministic chain of Necessity: 'Man is in no case, strictly speaking, the beginner of any event or series of events that take place in the universe, but only the vehicle through which certain antecedents operate' (p.351), and so 'we perpetually annex erroneous ideas to this phrase, that we are the authors. Though mind be a real and proper antecedent, it is in no case a first cause. ... Thought is the medium.'<sup>32</sup>

So, in *Adeline Mowbray*, when Adeline is inculcated with philosophical notions by her mother, taking them to be ethical values on which she could model her life, and she is shown clearly as being only the vehicle for these ideas and not the originator, Opie is recalling Godwinian ideas of determinism here also. Godwin's ideas are

<sup>31</sup> Maggie Kilgour, *The Rise of the Gothic Novel* (London: Routledge, 1995), p.57.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p.50.



therefore operating both within the framework of the narrative and as phenomenological underpinnings to it.

Both Godwin (b.1756) and Wollstonecraft (b.1759) had the authority of age over Amelia Alderson, as she then was (b.1769), as well as of intellectual stature. Wollstonecraft referred to her as 'Mademoiselle Alderson' in her notes to Godwin and the constant inference of her messages to him about her is to maximise Alderson's youthful ingenuousness. In short, Wollstonecraft is setting up a form of parental relationship in matters intellectual and social between herself and Godwin as regards their young *protégée* (*lit.* 'protected person') – precisely the ambit of the novel. This is demonstrated in the narrative when Mrs Mowbray presents Glenmurray to Adeline as the proponent of certain philosophies which meet with her endorsement: a powerful position indeed. 'On the works of this writer Adeline had often heard her mother descant in terms of the highest praise' (p.15). There are echoes of this relationship in the letters Opie wrote to both Godwin and the then Mrs. Imlay in 1795/6. Her letter of 28 August, 1795 describes her visit to Norwich after spending time with them as giving her 'the opportunity of entering into myself, of thinking over *à tête reposée* the scenes and persons I have left, of marshalling the new ideas I have gained, and of acting in consequence of them.'<sup>33</sup>

If this relationship of intellectual parents can be accepted, the construction of Adeline's relationship with her mother and her mother's values indicates Amelia Opie writing in a spirit of disillusion

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<sup>33</sup> Opie to William Godwin, 28 August 1795; Bodleian, Dep.6. 210/6.

with the values held by Wollstonecraft and Godwin, and also at Godwin's subsequent departure from these values. While she describes with evident anger the prejudice of society which Adeline encounters – the actions of Dr Norberry's wife and daughters (pp.93-96), the failure of the village school (pp.167-170), the attitudes of Langley and Mary Warner (pp.202-3) – she also distances herself, often by satire, from those values and from their proponents, not merely because of the political expediency of needing to be published, as discussed in my analysis of *Father and Daughter* above, but also for the way they fly so hard in the face of social mores of her time, damaging any young woman who might adopt them on the advice of her intellectual mentors. On this point, Tevis writes:

Amelia Opie, although she was intimate with Godwin and with many of his associates, could not share his view of marriage. On the contrary, it seemed to her to be shocking and immoral. *Adeline Mowbray* ably demonstrates her satiric intention to apply Godwin's theory of marriage in actual life-situations and to note the outcome.<sup>34</sup>

Tevis's view seems a reductionist one: it is not merely a question of noting outcomes, but the full-length description of the fate of a young woman who is presented with an intellectually stimulating but societally opposed set of values, and who refuses to depart from them. To refer to Opie's attitudes towards Godwin's view of marriage as 'shocking and immoral' is to minimise the long and close relationship the two shared. When Godwin finally married, Opie's reaction was

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<sup>34</sup> Tevis, p.36.

much more complex than that of, for example, Elizabeth Inchbald. Tevis also suggests that 'Mrs Mowbray might well be the mouthpiece of Amelia Opie herself', but Mrs Mowbray's carefully constructed egotism is the reason for her dysfunction as a parent, causing Adeline's incompatible principles.<sup>35</sup>

The disillusionment in connection with Godwin is evident when Opie writes of Glenmurray's ideas in the context of corrupting Adeline's pure heart and mind, both *tabula rasa* open to intellectual and emotional stimuli:

One author in particular, by a train of reasoning captivating though sophistical, and plausible though absurd, made her a delighted convert to his opinions, and prepared her young and impassioned heart for the practice of vice, by filling her mind, ardent in the love of virtue, with new and singular opinions on the subject of moral duty. (p.14)

The incompatibility of the values with which Adeline has been inculcated and the social mores and conventions of the day are sharply apposite when Adeline informs her mother that she loves Glenmurray and he her, and that they wish to live together. The interview starts badly when Mrs. Mowbray realises that Adeline has spent the afternoon alone with Glenmurray in his apartments: "What!" [exclaims Mrs. Mowbray,] "visit a man alone at his lodgings, after the education which you have received?" Adeline is nonplussed, and replies: "Indeed, madam, ... my education never taught me that such conduct was improper; nor, as you did the same this afternoon, could I

have dared think it so" (p.38). Opie neatly suggests not only the conflict between Adeline's learned values and those of society, but also the double standard which Mrs Mowbray, who has been visiting her suitor O'Carrol, seeks to apply. This interchange of mutual astonishment and bafflement only anticipates the larger matter. After informing her mother of her plans and feelings regarding Glenmurray, and finding that her mother is less than pleased that she contemplates marrying a man of such small fortune, and "'shunned for his principles and profligacy by all the world'" (p.40), Amelia rushes to correct her parent:

"But you are quite mistaken in supposing me so lost to consistency, and so regardless of your liberal opinions, and the books which we have studied, as to think of *marrying* Mr Glenmurray."

"Grant me patience!" cried Mrs Mowbray: "why, to be sure you do not think of living with him *without* being married?"

"Certainly madam, that you may have the pleasure of beholding one union founded on rational grounds and cemented by rational ties."

"How!" cried Mrs Mowbray, turning pale. "I! – I have pleasure in seeing my daughter a kept mistress! You are mad, quite mad. – *I* approve such unhallowed connections!" (p.40)

The conflict for Adeline, aged nineteen, is the adolescent one of expecting certain black-and-white consistencies in adult behaviours, and not finding them in practice. Mrs Mowbray is furious with her daughter, who, in turn, finds her mother's attitude hard to understand. Adeline had expected her mother's approval, not her astonished disbelief and inability to reconcile philosophic theory with practice. The exchange continues with Adeline expressing her confusion to her

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

mother, who takes appropriate, sudden action – but too late:

"My dearest mother," replied Adeline, "your agitation terrifies me, - but indeed what I say is strictly true: and see here, in Mr Glenmurray's book, the very passage which I so often have heard you admire."

As she said this, Adeline pointed to the passage; but in an instant Mrs Mowbray seized the book and threw it on the fire. (ibid.)

The following morning, Mrs. Mowbray attempts to reason further with Adeline, with such utterances as:

"Little did I think you were so romantic as to see no difference between amusing one's imagination with new theories and new systems, and acting upon them in defiance of common custom, and the received usages of society. I admire the convenient trowsers and graceful dress of the Turkish women; but I would not wear them myself, lest it should expose me to derision." (pp.40-41)

The effect on Adeline is carefully described in a way which heightens the ideological tension between abstract truth and conventional behaviour:

Adeline listened in silent astonishment and consternation. Conscience, and the conviction of what is right, she then for the first time learned, were not to be the rule of action; ... "Would to heaven, my dear mother," said Adeline ... "that you had said all this to me ere my mind had been indelibly impressed with the truth of these forbidden doctrines; for now my conscience tells me that I ought to act upon them." (p.41)

Despite the sentimental characteristics in Opie's protagonist, Adeline's rejection of marriage for the sake of her philosophical principles constitutes a challenge to conventional writing, just as Godwin and Wollstonecraft's cohabitation was to conventional

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society. Opie thus makes clear the gap between philosophical notions and social convention, and explicitly condemns Mrs Mowbray for presenting to her daughter the former in the guise of the latter.

This excerpt also presents further evidence of some of the disillusionment which exists in the writing. The implication is clearly that Amelia Opie felt she was being persuaded to take on unworkable values from her philosophical mentors. There is evidence of this in some of the correspondence from Opie to Godwin, particularly that of 28 August 1795, in which she writes from Norwich of needing time to reflect on the ‘new ideas’ she has gained from him while in London.<sup>36</sup> It is a central irony of the novel that Glenmurray, faced with the reality of social acceptance, is quite prepared to abandon his philosophical stance and marry Adeline, but it is she who, having taken his reasoning to heart, cannot put it aside. This refusal can be seen as a kind of *hubris*, challenging the gods of social convention, which sets her up as a tragic heroine who will therefore eventually meet her *nemesis*. Given Opie's interest in the dramatic genre – she wrote at least two plays during 1795-6, when she was a member of the Godwin-Wollstonecraft circle – and her use of dramatic structures and conventions in her tales, it is not surprising that the dramatic parameters of tragedy fit so easily to her narrative. From this perspective, it will be seen that *Adeline Mowbray* functions as a tragedy in the Shakespearean manner.

Considered rationally, one cannot blame Adeline – or real-life

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<sup>36</sup> Opie to Godwin, 28 August 1795; Bodleian, B.Dep 6/210, 6.

radical philosophers such as Wollstonecraft – for resisting the convention of marriage. While Wollstonecraft was open about her relationship with Godwin, she had until then taken the title of Mrs. Imlay, although she was never actually married to the American, the implication being that she wished to present a conventional appearance. For the males, both Godwin and Glenmurray take a similar view: that marriage is an emotional mindset shared between two people, and does not require the sanction of the legal and religious institutions of society to make it real. Godwin, describing his relationship with Mary Wollstonecraft in the *Memoirs* (1798), wrote: 'We did not marry ... nothing can be so ridiculous on the face of it, or so contrary to the genuine march of sentiment, as to require the overflowing of the soul to wait upon a ceremony.'<sup>37</sup> In his earlier writings, Godwin had pointed to the absurdity of expecting 'the inclinations and wishes of two human beings [to] coincide through any long period of time' and therefore 'To oblige them to live together [in marriage] is to subject them to some inevitable portion of thwarting, bickering and unhappiness.'<sup>38</sup> Godwin elaborates this position in his following remarks: 'Marriage is laws, and the worst of all laws... Marriage is an affair of property, and the worst of all properties.'<sup>39</sup> Glenmurray echoes these sentiments when he speaks of 'no other ties

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<sup>37</sup> Godwin, *Memoirs of the Author of 'A Vindication of the Rights of Man'*, p.155.

<sup>38</sup> Godwin, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, 3rd ed. (London: 1798), Bk.II, in Marshall, ed., *The Anarchist Writing of William Godwin* (London: Freedom Press, 1986), p.82.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, p.83.

or sanction than those of love or reason' as the basis for his philosophical speculations on the subject of marriage (p.36). Later, Godwin was to recant much of what he wrote in *Political Justice* by claiming that he was swayed by 'the unqualified condemnation of private affections' at the time of writing.<sup>40</sup> He further points out that as a 'timorous advocate', he often 'began with a skirmishing war' in his considerations of his subject-matter, and that 'This owing to a frequent miscarriage and experience of my own inaccuracy' led him to take positions which later became untenable.<sup>41</sup> Godwin's aim in 1792 had been frugality, whereas in later years he practised a less rigorous lifestyle.<sup>42</sup>

But this is a male view of marriage, which draws on the male freedoms in such matters. A more cogent argument from the female point of view would be constructed along issues of the abandonment of legal personality and property rights which marriage involved for women, and the impossibility, for all practical purposes, of subsequently obtaining a divorce. From a philosophical or rational standpoint, it is clear that for a woman of any means, marriage is quite illogical. The very enthusiasm with which the male-dominated social conventions promoted marriage for women, while condoning sexual adventuring for men, reinforces this rational view against it: if marriage really were such an advantageous position for a woman, it

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<sup>40</sup> Godwin 'The Principal Revolutions of Opinion' in Phelp, ed., 1, p.53.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.55.

<sup>42</sup> See Marshall, p.144 & ff.



would not have required such fervent advocacy. Such a construction of marriage would seem to tie in with that of Wollstonecraft herself, who, in a letter written to Amelia Opie on April 11, 1797, describes her own clear-cut sense of moral purpose, in phrases which Adeline Mowbray might have uttered. Wollstonecraft writes that 'my conduct in life must be directed by my own judgement and moral principles.' Later in the same letter she adds: 'I am proud, perhaps, conscious of my own purity and integrity.'<sup>43</sup> The larger context of the letter is concerned with the issue that was to be treated in Opie's novel: the conflict between the social significance of marriage and its erosion of a woman's independence. This erosion is not Adeline's reason for opposing marriage: she opposes it because she has adopted Glenmurray's views. Nevertheless, there is a certain heteroglossia present here, for the narrative voice of the novel recognises the extent to which maintenance of the institution of marriage is in the interests of the possessive male. Opie's portrayal of Berrendale and his relationship with Adeline leaves no doubt of that. In her letter Wollstonecraft writes of the way in which she expects both Godwin and herself to retain a high degree of individual autonomy even though they are married:

It is my wish that Mr Godwin should visit and dine out as formerly, and I shall do the same. In short, I still mean to be independent ... I wished, while fulfilling the duty of a mother, to have some person of similar pursuits, bound to me by

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<sup>43</sup> Wollstonecraft to Opie, April 11, 1797 (Abinger Mss.,119), in Ralph Wardle, *Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1979), p.389.

affection.<sup>44</sup>

Even the way in which the letter is signed, 'Femme Godwin', suggests the difficulty Wollstonecraft had in reconciling her principles with her recently-married state. The odium gathered around anyone pointing out this illogicality in the married state is represented in the novel by Glenmurray's public reputation and in real life by that of Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. Ty illustrates the extent of this odium by pointing out how Wollstonecraft had been maliciously listed in the *Anti-Jacobin Review* of 1798 under the classification 'Prostitution'.<sup>45</sup>

Ty also suggests that women writers of the time who present conflicting views on marriage are revealing their own confusion in the face of an illogical but socially-enforced state of being. Referring to Opie specifically, Ty says that to speak 'on behalf of marriage and then undercut it makes *Adeline Mowbray* an example of the kind of writing that is characteristic of those women who were caught between two camps during the 1790s.' She develops this view:

Perhaps to avoid being labelled and ridiculed as a follower of Wollstonecraft, then, many of these writers developed narrative techniques and methods of representation which enabled them to explore highly charged political topics without censure. Rather than using polemics and confrontation, they employed more indirect means of examining the legitimacy of masculine authority, the prescribed ideal of the docile female, or the proper kind of education for women.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ty, 1993, p.23.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p.20.

Ty again specifies Opie, who, 'like Edgeworth, Radcliffe and Hamilton, weaves between the Burkean and the radical beliefs, not offering her readers a single, comfortable, solid position.'<sup>47</sup> This is a rather unsatisfactory way of approaching the novel because it suggests only two ideological positions, the Burkean and the radical. There were many radicalisms, and, no doubt, many reactionary positions, probably overlapping in areas such as that of female education. The range of responses by women writers to social conventions at this time, particularly in terms of gender relations and power, is so broad as to require more than two categories in which to place them. However, given only two categories in which to place a novel, it is unsurprising that she finds placing *Adeline Mowbray* problematic. Commenting on Adeline's endorsement of marriage towards the end of volume three, Ty says:

While this renunciation of her conviction seems to make the novel an anti-Jacobin tract against the new 'philosophy', several other elements in the text reveal a contradictory view, an underlying sympathy for revolutionary advocates.<sup>48</sup>

*Adeline Mowbray* is a complex novel, sustained by a credible and penetrating view of the complex society it portrays. To expect it to fit one of only two categories is reductive, and therefore gives rise to what Ty sees as 'a kind of questioning, or even subversion'.<sup>49</sup> Her observation is reminiscent of Johnson's comment of how the tale

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p.29.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p.30.

‘invalidates all the answers’.<sup>50</sup> The text itself, however, is perfectly lucid, and the confusion seems to rest in the critical gaze. Ty’s subsequent writing on this novel recognises the limitation of the binary view, discussing its complexities through the focus of the mother-daughter relationship. She writes of perceiving a new ideological perspective based on an objective distance:

I see Opie as an author who sympathized with and understood what the radicals were espousing, but who remained distant enough to perceive the difficulties of practising their theories without there being changes in society at large.<sup>51</sup>

This view at least legitimises the novel’s ideology, rather than seeing it inconsistently ‘weaving’ between two extremes.

Male attitudes to the position of women who do not obey the male-centred construct of the institution of marriage are shown by the character of Sir Patrick O’Carrol, who can only perceive the unmarried, anti-marriage Adeline as a fruit ripe for plucking.

Adeline appeared in his eyes not a deceived enthusiast, but a susceptible and forward girl, endeavouring to hide her frailty [i.e. her sexuality] under fine sentiments and high-sounding theories. Nor was Sir Patrick’s inference an unusual one. Every man of the world would have thought the same; and on very plausible grounds. (p.32)

We see O’Carrol’s opportunistic view of women expressed in the way in which he flatters and eventually marries Mrs. Mowbray, in the hopes of attaching Adeline to him one way or another and also resolving his financial difficulties. His view of Adeline as a sexual

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<sup>50</sup> Johnson, p.22.

<sup>51</sup> Ty, 1998, p.151.

adventurer is particularly revealed in the way in which he addresses himself to her on this subject.

‘Now then, to open my mind to you,’ said the baronet, drawing his chair close to hers, ‘From the very first moment I saw you, I felt that we were made for one another, though, being bothered by my debts, I made up to the old duchess, and she nibbled the bait directly.’ ‘How dreadfully incoherent he is!’ thought Adeline, not suspecting for a moment that, by the old duchess, he meant her still blooming mother. (p.32)

O'Carrol's discourse is wrongly chosen for Adeline, but would have been perfectly coherent to the female opportunist in the novel, *Mary Warner*. Equally, he is so corrupted by the world that he is unable to understand Adeline's naive directness, as the ensuing dialogue illustrates clearly. Opie disarms this male opportunism by making O'Carrol comic - even his timely death is comic – but, as she points out in the preceding quotation, this male attitude is prevalent. The warning which she writes into the character of O'Carrol is reminiscent of the tropes she used in figuring the libertine Ormington in *The Dangers of Coquetry* and Clifford in *Father and Daughter*, and also reminiscent of the rapacious Sir Peter Osborne in Mary Hay's *The Victim of Prejudice* (1799), of whom Eleanor Ty writes:

In Osborne's limited understanding, all women are stereotyped either as the mother or the whore, the angel or the mistress. ... He sees her [Mary, the protagonist] only as his 'other', projecting his desire onto her, and

refusing to see her as the individual she is. His stereotypical and automatic categorisation of her is a form of victimisation. This is literalised through his manipulations; she is reduced to 'a daughter of Eve', a figure of temptation in the eyes of men.<sup>52</sup>

In Opie's depiction of O'Carrol, however, there is mockery. From the security of her married state and writing well within the stage convention of the comic libertine, Opie treats this reprehensible character as a figure of fun. He is reduced by humour, and the reader, particularly the female reader, can laugh at his sexual opportunism rather than dread it. The pen of the woman writer is thus able to negate, or at least reduce, the threat of the libertine male.

O'Carrol thus serves as a foil for Glenmurray, enabling the latter to be presented not as a libertine but as a sensitive and essentially virtuous, if misguided, man – a conventional character of sentimental fiction, in fact. For example, Glenmurray does not invade Adeline's space and person or assault her sensibilities in the way O'Carrol repeatedly and insensitively does, such as on p.33, where he presumes to attempt to kiss her familiarly. There is a certain stereotyping here: O'Carrol is an Irish baronet, and such a character in the eyes of the reader of the time is a cue for comedy as the lascivious, fortune-hunting Irishman: Lieutenant Fitzpatrick in *Tom Jones* for example.

The other Irishman in Opie's narrative is a Colonel Mordaunt, sensible of Adeline's charms, but 'not a *marrying man*, as it is called' (p.21). As a man of honour, Mordaunt leaves Bath, where they first met, rather than become involved in an *amour*. Whereas O'Carrol is

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<sup>52</sup> Ty, ed., p.xviii.

sexually corrupt, Mordaunt may be seen as a repressed sexual opportunist, and although he does reappear in the later stages of the narrative as a faithful admirer, his passions are never requited.

Of Mary Warner, the maid, more must be said, since Opie uses this character as a contrast to that of Adeline herself. A working-class pragmatist, Mary is unable to share Adeline's conviction of the moral superiority of her unmarried state, and like O'Carrol, she has no eye for fine moral distinctions. Adeline, in her view, was 'a kept miss' and she cheekily tells her: '... if master is inclined to make an honest woman of you, you had better take him at his word, I think' (p.117). This simple statement is interestingly rendered: the term 'honest woman' reveals an assumption by the Mary Warners of the world of a present dishonesty in Adeline's situation: a moral lack, in direct contrast to Adeline's perception of her state as being one of moral superiority. It is incredible to Mary that the social ostracism Adeline endures is of her own making. Also, by her phrase 'if master is inclined', the initiative for marriage is seen to lie solely with the male and suggests that most women in what Mary takes to be Adeline's situation have to wait until their partner decides to propose marriage: further, that such a proposal is the best of all outcomes of their liaison.

There is a direct effect on Mary's future job prospects, and she informs Adeline of this as she leaves her service to seek another employer: 'I must beg that you will not own that you are no better than you should be, when a lady comes to ask my character; for then perhaps, I should not find anyone to take me'(p.117). Mary is furious

when Adeline refuses to lie for her by referring to herself as Mrs Glenmurray, aware that this refusal will make it more difficult for her to find work. Opie herself had had difficulty with a maid, Anne, whom she found doing laundry that was supposed to be sent out, and charging extra for it. ‘Her cry is “Give me a character, for God’s sake!”, but how can I?’ she asked of Susannah Taylor.<sup>53</sup> Mary Warner is a vehicle for the opinions of the *demi-monde*, who, like Moll Flanders, must tailor their morality to suit the exigencies of their situation – another direct contrast to Adeline’s moral constancy. However, it must be admitted that Mary Warner, although an unattractive character, does have a point. The incident may be seen as a manifestation of how Adeline’s moral values, and hence her behaviour, have a deleterious effect on those around her. Opie is hereby demonstrating the ripple effect of unconventional social behaviour, reminding us that no-one, man or woman, is an island. This can be interpreted as a call to accept the *status quo* for the common good of those with whom one comes into contact, and as such indicates a conservative point of view from Opie. However, this terminology is very loaded and therefore liable to mislead. Other facets of Opie’s tale are radical: her challenge regarding the convention of marriage, for example. Opie is a Dissenting reformist, not a revolutionary, and we can therefore expect to find many shades of political opinion in her work.

Mary Warner is to reappear in the novel in an important middle stage when Adeline is attempting to prove that Berrendale,

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<sup>53</sup> Opie to Mrs J. Taylor, 1802; Huntington Library, OP64.



Glenmurray's cousin who marries her after his death, was in fact her husband. Adeline encounters Langley, a lawyer (male, of course) whose attitude to her is strongly similar to that of O'Carrol. A refinement is that Langley treats her contemptuously at first because her openness about her non-married state with Glenmurray being by then infamous, he assumes that her liaison with Berrendale is also as an unmarried woman, especially when she is unable to produce any admissible evidence to the contrary. Langley, however, reveals the hypocrisy of conventional society, for he is privately involved with a woman who is recognised by Adeline as Mary Warner, at what is probably the apex of her career of self-betterment through sexual opportunism. Mary is just as scornful of Adeline's state, as ignorant of her moral refinement and as uncaring of her philosophical sophistry as she ever was. Further, she now regards herself and Adeline as equals, although Opie's brief yet engaging description of her makes it clear that she is not:

the door opened, and a lady, rouged like a French countess of the ancien regime, her hair covered with a profusion of brown powder, and dressed in the height of fashion, ambled into the room; and saying "How d'ye do, miss Mowbray?" threw herself carelessly on the sofa. (pp.202-3)

Adeline finds the intrusion too painful, and the contrast between the parvenu and the decayed woman of virtue is skilfully portrayed. Even Langley is moved by Adeline's evident superiority of sensibilities and morality, and finds himself at a loss as to how so fine

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a woman could have been so misconceived in her values to live so openly with a man in an unmarried state. The interchange between the two women is marked by what Patricia Michaelson describes as 'male language' on the part of Mary Warner, now styled 'Mrs. Montgomery'.<sup>54</sup> Michaelson defines the 'female language' of the day as including features of 'positive politeness', an 'exaggerated vocabulary' and being of a 'quantity and emptiness' which was, moreover, 'a stable category that all women were presumed to utilize'.<sup>55</sup> By contrast, Warner is aggressive and sarcastic: "But come, sit down, my dear," cried Mary; "no ceremony, you know, among friends and equals, you know; and you and I have been mighty familiar, you know, before now" (p.203). Warner continues in this manner, flaunting her triumph and gloating over Adeline's misfortunes.

Opie is here emphasising Warner's parvenu qualities in a re-rendering of her discourse, making Adeline immobile in horror, and the inappropriate speech she places in Warner's mouth is crucial to the effectiveness of this interchange. The contrast between the public rectitude/private vice of Langley and Mary Warner, deemed acceptable by society, and the public obloquy/private morality of Adeline and Glenmurray, is never so well shown as here.

This leads us back to the issue of Adeline's egotistical parent, and the contrast with the truly nurturing characters of the novel, her

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<sup>54</sup> Michaelson, p.152.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp.121-123.

parents in all but the familial sense, who provide her with, on the one hand, fatherly care and, on the other, a way of dealing with the world without being ostracised from it. These two characters are Dr Norberry and Mrs Pemberton. The depiction of the quasi-parental roles of these two characters is reinforced by Opie's scrupulous use of their titles in her narrative: 'Mistress Pemberton' and 'Doctor Norberry' are never referred to solely by their surnames, as is the case with Langley, for example. This careful consistency in the writing serves to suggest the respect with which these two characters are invested.

In his introduction, Wordsworth writes that Dr Norberry is based on Amelia Opie's father, Dr Alderson. Certainly, both are medical doctors, both share the same given name, and both espouse liberal views. By the values of the day, these make Norberry something of a radical figure. At the time of writing the novel, Norberry interposes in certain episodes of Adeline's story as infrequently but as influentially as does Dr Alderson in Amelia's life in London – his disapproval but later acceptance of John Opie, for example.<sup>56</sup> The same role of background support is shared between the two men, one fictional, the other real life. Described by Wordsworth as 'stubborn and truth-telling', Norberry has some of the characteristics of the paternal parent that we saw in the person of Mr Seymour in *Father and Daughter*, and represents the sober but liberal-thinking patriarchal figure.<sup>57</sup> It is Norberry, for example, who makes

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<sup>56</sup> See MacGregor, p.24.

<sup>57</sup> Wordsworth, ed., unpaginated.

the utterance 'which fixed [the young Adeline] in the path of literary ambition' (p.16), a positive reinforcement of her love of study, in contrast to her mother's disparaging remarks.

Later in the tale, Norberry reappears after writing Adeline to inform her of the effect of her elopement on her mother, who had 'declared a solemn resolution never to see you more, and to renounce you for ever' (p.86). His letter ends with a fatherly expression: he salutes her as 'child of my affection' and his subscribing question clearly shows the parental concern he feels for her: 'Why must I blush to subscribe myself / Your sincere friend' (ibid.). After snubbing her in public, when he is with his daughters and she with her lover Glenmurray, in a further echo of Mr Seymour's attitude, he visits her privately, where he explains his conduct as the fulfillment of a painful task - that is, of having to be seen to deliver the snub. 'I obeyed my head when I passed you so cavalierly, and I thought I should never have gone through my task as I did; – but then, *for the sake of my daughters*, I gave a gulp and called up a fierce look' (p.88, my italics).

In the dialogue which follows, Norberry takes the role of a fatherly figure, interlocutory, patient and rational, while Glenmurray and Adeline explain their unmarried state, particularly when Glenmurray makes it clear that he is willing to marry Adeline, and she rebuts him. 'I became the mistress of Glenmurray from the dictates of my reason,' says Adeline, 'not my weakness or his persuasions'. (p.88)

At this point in the tale, Opie introduces Mrs. Norberry and the daughters, and these run throughout this part of the narrative

contrapuntally to the Doctor. Where he is stern but caring and willing to enter into dialogue, these women are contemptuously condescending towards Adeline, losing no opportunity to put her in her place beneath them as a fallen woman. Opie's point is that in her intellectual and emotional integrity Adeline is superior to their small-mindedness: it is just that she is horribly mistaken. Even the Doctor finds his daughters' attitudes disheartening.

Norberry next appears in the tale at a low point in the fortunes of Adeline and Glenmurray, though not in person. They write to him, invoking his constant offers of assistance, and receive a reply from Mrs. Norberry, informing them that the Doctor is ill, and enclosing the contemptible gift of a pound note from each of the daughters, which they are able to return as a salve to their wounded dignity (p.141).

Norberry is then instrumental in assisting Mrs. Mowbray to locate Adeline when she wishes to see her daughter again to forgive her. Finally he appears at the deathbed, knowing that he, a physician, cannot save Adeline and moved to tears by her fate. A deathbed appearance is a conventional signal employed by Opie to indicate emotional bonds between the characters and an opportunity for reconciliation (as in both *The Dangers of Coquetry* and *Father and Daughter*) and this is certainly the case here.

As a parent, then, Norberry presents characteristics of integrity and compassion. He despairs of Adeline's *hubris* in refusing to marry, and fears for the consequences. He is the moral arbiter and touchstone of true values that, for reasons of her egotism, Adeline's mother was

never able to be. After his initial greeting of "Seducer," to Glenmurray, he is able to respect Adeline's partner, if not agree with him (p.88). These, it may be said, seem to be fatherly values of the best kind.

Also present at the deathbed is Mrs. Pemberton. It is this character who provides Amelia with the moral instruction which, according to the patterns of mother-daughter discourse, is necessary if protagonists such as those in the tales of Opie and other women writers – and, by extension, the young female readers of the tales – are to thread the maze of social acceptability and the marriage market. Mrs. Pemberton first appears in volume two, at a point in the narrative when the ineluctable nature of the decline in Adeline's fortunes is quickly becoming plain. Glenmurray is dying of consumption – he will not last another thirty pages – and Mary Warner, the maid, is seeking another post. Adeline is in need of some firm values to cling to as her world crumbles around her, and these appear in the person of Mrs. Pemberton, who is enquiring about Mary's suitability for employment. Aware of the way in which she is perceived by the world at large, Adeline is nervous about meeting Mrs Pemberton: 'for the first time she felt that she was going to appear before a fellow-creature as an object of scorn, and though an enthusiast for virtue, to be considered as a votary of vice' (p.119). Nevertheless, she resolutely has herself announced as 'miss Mowbray'.

Mrs Pemberton appears as a woman of moral authority, for she is 'dressed in the neat, modest garb of the strict Quaker – a garb which creates an immediate idea in the mind, of more than common rigidity

of principles and sanctity of conduct in the wearer of it' (ibid.). This description of a Quaker woman as a moral entity is prophetic of Amelia Opie's own life, for nineteen years after the publication of *Adeline Mowbray*, she was to announce her own convictions as a Quaker and apply to join the Society of Friends. There is one other reference to Quakerism earlier in the novel: in volume one, when Adeline and Glenmurray have moved to Lisbon in an effort to restore his health, she is described by another Englishman whom they meet as being 'In dress ... as neat as a quaker ... and her mind seems as pure as her dress' (p.73).

Opie sometimes repeats certain names in her works, and Pemberton is one of these: in 1826, the year after her acceptance into the Society, she was to produce a volume of tales for children entitled *Tales of the Pemberton Family*. Opie's friendship with the influential Quakers the Gurneys of Earlham probably contributed to the positive presentation of Quakers in her writing. We have already seen how the longstanding friendship of Amelia with the Gurney daughters, Louisa, Priscilla and Betsy (later Elizabeth Fry), survived Amelia's involvement with radical politics and London social life.

Another clue to the moral nature of the character of Mrs Pemberton is her discourse, which Friends refer to as 'plain speech'. A feature of this style of address is the use of the second person singular, already sufficiently disappeared from normal speech to make it a distinctive feature in 1805; another is the use of archaic tags on the verbs in this form, so that Mrs. Pemberton's conversation is made up of

constructions such as 'thou art' (p.120), 'thine excuse' (ibid.) and 'thou judgest' (p.121). The form of the verb gives the discourse a directness and personal, even intimate quality (c.f. French *tu*, German *du*, etc.) no longer present in standard English, while its scriptural nature provides an authoritativeness rich in moral underpinnings, since this is the language of the seventeenth-century translations of the Bible which were in common use at this time. Opie herself was to make her adoption of plain speech one of the first signifiers of her entry to the Quakers in 1825. Michaelson points out how plain speech is 'an unchanging mode of language in all circumstances' and 'the opposite of conversational politeness'.<sup>58</sup>

As with Norberry's first contact with Glenmurray, Mrs Pemberton's manner is one of 'cold dignity', but after some further dialogue, she becomes convinced of Adeline's inherent purity (p.121). There follows a discussion of Adeline's situation, during which, in accordance with the principles of plain speech, Mrs Pemberton is able to point out to Adeline that, in giving her unmarried state 'an air of respectability, thou hast only made it more dangerous.' On this point, expectedly, Adeline disagrees, and so the reader is left, as with the dialogue between Norberry and Glenmurray, with two rational people agreeing to disagree, each allowing the other that liberty of thought which had been so much in contention a decade earlier. Ultimately, Adeline recognises that Mrs Pemberton is right. The process she goes through to arrive at this conclusion is typical of the Quaker practice of

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<sup>58</sup> Michaelson, p.120.



resisting a dogmatic approach but enabling the enquirer to arrive at her own recognition of what is right.

In presenting us with such a character as Mrs Pemberton, to be seen in conjunction with the other parental figure of Dr Norberry, Opie is presenting two significantly non-establishment figures: an extreme Dissenter and a radical, although benign, *philosophe* who is sensible of a middle way between stark principle and social convention. This combination is rich in allusion, both to the outcome of the novel and to the circumstances of Opie's own life. Her choice of these figures to effect Adeline's salvation underscores the importance Opie placed on the forces either figure represented in society as moral arbiters: after all the false trails – Glenmurray, Mrs. Mowbray, Langley and the rest – it is the reforming *philosophe* and the frugal, unhypocritical Quaker who are presented as embodying some truth and integrity. Not only is Opie's ideological position becoming worked out, but the novel is an uncanny prediction of the path that she herself would follow in the coming years. It appears that she is testing in fiction the values that she would later apply to her own life. Mrs Pemberton may be seen as the creation of a fictional character that in this case supports with social mores rather than struggles against them.

Both Norberry and Mrs Pemberton have salutary effects on Adeline's mental and material wellbeing, although they cannot undo the harm that has been done to the latter by her earlier adherence to an extreme philosophy. They are able to provide support and steadfast

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counselling, in line with the nurturing role of parents, when all others seem opposed. However, they do not meet each other until the final stages of the narrative, when they are foregathered for the deathbed scene (p.260 and ff.). The point of this meeting is that each is able to find a reconciliation with the other's views at this emotionally-charged time. Norberry is cautious at the meeting at first, saying that 'no doubt she [Mrs Pemberton] was a very good sort of woman, but that he did not like pretensions to righteousness over much, and had a particular aversion to a piece of formal drab coloured morality' (p.248).

However, on meeting Mrs Pemberton sobbing loudly on the bosom of Mrs Mowbray, he gazes at her with astonishment. 'where was the repulsive formality that he had expected? "Zounds!" thought he, "this woman can feel like other women, and is as good a hand at a crying-bout as myself"' (p.267). This may be seen as a rather late example of the cult of tears, which indicated benevolent sorrow directed towards an individual's misfortune. After describing a brief interchange between Mrs Pemberton and the Doctor, Opie writes that

he was never easy but when he could converse with Mrs Pemberton .... The invalid [Adeline] herself observed his attention to her friend ... and such was the respect with which she [Mrs Pemberton] inspired him that ... he told Adeline, that were all quakers like Mrs Pemberton, he should be tempted to cry 'Drab is your only wear.' (p.267)

Mrs Pemberton herself is satisfied that the cycle of Adeline's erring, contrition, penitence and reconciliation has run its course to achieve salvation. Importantly, Adeline had earlier revised her views on marriage, confessing 'my full conviction of the fallacy of my past

opinions' (p.216) and subscribing this change to 'a more serious, unimpassioned and unprejudiced view of the subject than I had before taken' (p.218). Mrs Pemberton tells Adeline 'At Rosevalley I beheld thee innocent, at Richmond guilty, and here I see thee penitent, and, I hope, resigned to thy fate' (p.266). The Christian themes of sin, repentance and forgiveness are thus made plain.

It is this act of reconciliation of Adeline with her mother, symbolising a reconciliation of ideologies, that causes the tale to be 'generally regarded as a grimly and patly conservative novel'.<sup>59</sup> From the perspective of a critic determined to read the work as either radical or conservative, the deathbed capitulation of Adeline's stand against marriage renders it as unequivocally conservative, and therefore all the worse for appearing to endorse radical values, but finally dismissing them. Such critics are then unable to account for the way in which several aspects of the narrative and several characters are far from conservative: the unhappy state of Adeline's marriage, for example. Johnson points out that 'Opie does not endorse the status quo without serious qualification. [She] dutifully denounces reformist zeal, only to tuck away parallel plots which indicate liberty, private conscience and the defiance of authority'.<sup>60</sup> In her recent publication, Ty gives emphasis to the tensions between Adeline and her mother as being at the core of the narrative: in that light, a resolution of that conflict is

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<sup>59</sup> Johnson, p.121.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p.xxi.

equally fundamental to the narrative structure.<sup>61</sup> If we allow that the novel is indeed some form of *roman à clef* and the representation of the iconic figure of Wollstonecraft is realigned from earlier readings of her as protagonist to my reading of her as the mother-figure, in keeping with the triangular structure of the narrative tensions, then it follows that the ideological loading of the tale is much too complex to allow a binary categorisation of either/or, radical/conservative. A clue to this complexity might be seen in the behaviour of both Norberry and Pemberton: just as there is a time when Norberry cannot recognise Adeline and Glenmurray in the street but yet visits her covertly to explain (p.88), so there is Pemberton's initial 'cold dignity' which later changes to warmth and support (p.119). In both instances, the earlier behaviour is that conservative pattern which society demands but which is subverted by the later behaviour. One is of appearance, the other of content, reminiscent of *The Dangers of Coquetry*. It is therefore possible to argue, as Gary Kelly does, that the novel may have the appearance of conformity with the demands of society, but, like life itself, seeks to subvert those appearances. Even this is somewhat unsatisfactory because Kelly's comment, like that of Ty, still attempts to place the novel in one of two camps, thus oversimplifying the complex fabric of ideological affinities of the time.<sup>62</sup>

In the bringing-together of the figures of Norberry and

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<sup>61</sup> Ty, 1998, p.146.

<sup>62</sup> See Kelly, 1981, p.11.

Pemberton, Opie presents us with a reconciliation between radical thought and Quakerism by pointing to the common humanity which underscores both: an awareness that the right action of Quakerism is not so removed from the democratic humanitarianism of radical politics as may be thought, and the stylised speech and dress of the one can also be seen in different ways in the other. There may have been the beginnings of a similar sense of amelioration in her own life at this time, and these would accelerate after her widowhood and her subsequent return to Norwich, where religious Dissent and political and social reform seemed to exist in the symbiotic harmony depicted in these two characters from her novel.

A further contrast in the characters of the novel must now be examined: that of the character of her lover Glenmurray with that of her husband Berrendale, for this is a tale of life single and married, and the depiction of Adeline's marriage must be attended to. This marriage is at the root different to Opie's own, in which she coexisted with John Opie as an equal partner, but has certain overtones of the financial difficulties the Opies had to face, especially in the period of shortfall just before the publication of *Father and Daughter* in 1801. The marriage of the Berrendales is no doubt typical of many in a time when the woman was so dependent on the man for the fulfilment of her material and emotional needs. Indeed, this very dependency may be seen as one of the reasons for the novel's existence.

Whereas Glenmurray clearly loved her, Berrendale, 'a pampered child' and, like her mother, another egotist, seems unable to

do so, being too wrapped up in his own well-being and amusement (p.182). Rather than treat her as an equal, as Glenmurray does, in accordance with his radical principles, Berrendale must mark her down as an inferior and try to control her. Opie thus presents an image of a patriarchal relationship within marriage, and shows the reader quite plainly just how demeaning it is for the woman, in contrast to the equality and regard Adeline had enjoyed from her lover. The foremost exponent of conservative ideas of marriage at the time was perhaps Edmund Burke (1729-1797), whose *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) made clear his views on the centrality of a benevolent patriarchy. In this depiction of a married relationship, Opie is distancing herself from this doctrine and positing again her own views on its potential for tyranny. It is particularly on this topic of marriage that, as Roxanne Eberle has observed,

Opie's novel moves beyond the parameters of the seduction novel and focuses on the philosophical conflicts of the early nineteenth century.... The story of the 'sexual woman' is the vehicle for a critique of the unjust system of social and legal regulation.<sup>63</sup>

Eberle's identification of the 'critique of the unjust system' may be seen, for example, six months into the marriage, when Berrendale realises what it is costing him. He first remonstrates with her over the cost of provisions, but then proceeds to 'resume his old habit of dining out amongst his friends, getting good dinners by that

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<sup>63</sup> Roxanne Eberle 'Amelia Opie's Adeline Mowbray: Diverting the Libertine Gaze; or the Vindication of a Fallen Woman' in *Studies in the Novel*, 26, 2 (1994), pp.121-146), p.123.

means without paying for them' (p.183), leaving her to subsist on 'the simplest fare' (p.182). This is too much for her servant Savannah, who declares war on Berrendale for his neglect of her beloved mistress, buying her sweetmeats out of her own money and ostentatiously offering them to her in front of him. Similarly, Kathryn Sutherland, writing on Hannah More, points out this inequality through the exercise of patriarchy: 'while the man is enjoying himself, as it is called, his wife and children are ragged and starving'.<sup>64</sup> The class setting is different, but the result is the same. Opie points out that some of the blame for Berrendale's financial difficulties rests with Adeline, for buying high-quality food. She has Adeline explain to him that 'good dinners can not be had without good ingredients, and good ingredients cost money', and that she 'had not been used to oeconomize, but I will try to learn' (p.181). This is reminiscent of comments Amelia Opie made about the early stages of her marriage, when John Opie 'saw himself at the end of that year, and the beginning of the next, almost wholly without employment; and even my sanguine temper yielding to the trial, I began to fear that, small as our expenditure was, it must become still smaller.'<sup>65</sup> However, Amelia Opie was able to avoid the dire straits in which she depicts Adeline Mowbray, and there is no evidence that she was unhappily married. The conversations over money in the novel are reminiscent of Elisa Haywood's *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751) in that all

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<sup>64</sup> Sutherland, p.39.

<sup>65</sup> Brightwell, p.93.

the power was on one side, that of the man. Berrendale is similar to the character of Mr Munden in that novel, for whom a wife was ‘a sort of upper servant, bound to study and obey’ the patriarchal husband.<sup>66</sup> Wollstonecraft’s unfinished novel *Maria* (1798) similarly emphasises the need for thrift and the ease with which a woman’s savings may be lost through no fault of her own: Peggy, the soldier’s widow losing her laundry, for example, or the constant tension between sexual obligation and independence.<sup>67</sup> The heroine of Frances Burney’s *Camilla* (1796) also discovers financial hardship and its relationship to the crucial matter of appearance. As Kristina Straub observes,

The twists and turns in *Camilla*’s courtship make her economically vulnerable.... Although she is by no means extravagant, the decorum of the public feminine role demands expenses past her means.<sup>68</sup>

The incident with the ballgown arrayed on her bed, ‘as superfluous as it was expensive’, dramatically conveys the precarious financial situation of the woman who is economically vulnerable in this way.<sup>69</sup>

Adeline is with child at this point, and Opie uses the time of her giving birth to have Adeline make a further comparison between Berrendale and Glenmurray. On Berrendale’s attending her after the delivery, ‘he rejoiced in Adeline’s safety; but he said within himself, “Children are expensive things, and we may have a large family”’

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<sup>66</sup> Elisa Haywood, p.138.

<sup>67</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *Mary: Maria*, ed. by Janet Todd (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p.99.

<sup>68</sup> Kristina Straub, *Divided Fictions* (Lexington: University of Kentucky, 1987), p.192.

<sup>69</sup> Frances Burney, *Camilla*, ed. by E. A. Bloom & L. D. Bloom (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), p.710.



(p.183). He leaves the bedside 'as soon as he could' to go for 'an afternoon's nap' (ibid.). She feels his self-absorption and contrasts it with Glenmurray's attitude. "How different ... would have been HIS feelings and HIS expressions of them at such a time!" (ibid.).

A further point of comparison is in the ways both men leave her. Glenmurray is claimed by tuberculosis, and dies anxious for her safety and well-being. Berrendale leaves her for the West Indies, where he marries another woman. The two leavings, one involuntary, the other a conscious act, indicate the qualities of lover and husband respectively. True to the barrenness heard in his name, Berrendale is indeed inhospitable and non-nurturing for Adeline.

Both relationships had made her vulnerable, but in different ways. Her refusal to marry Glenmurray, even though he was willing to abandon his earlier principles on the superfluity of marriage to the loving couple, had exposed both of them, but Adeline particularly, to the social ostracism that is plainly shown in the tale, even beyond his death. Within marriage, however, she is vulnerable financially as well as emotionally, and at the mercy of an egotist in the same way as she was as a child, and the states of married woman and child are directly analogous in these respects. It is in the interests of a patriarchal society to keep women in a child-like state: naive, temperamental, capricious, and thus easily-managed. Although capable of independence, as seen from the episode of running a school, Adeline is not permitted to exercise these abilities within marriage, but must remain a chattel for

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Berrendale's amusement.

If Opie really was solely the conservative writer that some critics feel her to be, she would have certainly handled the institution of marriage rather differently. Her own marriage was a happy one, and she could have based that of Adeline and Berrendale on this. The fact that, after her portrayal of a liaison in which Adeline flourishes, Opie portrays a marriage in which she is reduced, makes too simple an alignment of her as a conservative writer rather awkward. It would have been easy for Opie to construct a plot in which, once married, Adeline is forgiven her youthful dogmatism on the subject, even finding joy in the married state, and is reconciled to living a life of matronly virtue and public approval. But this is not so: the depiction of her marriage is a depiction of her misery and victimisation, not of a benevolent patriarchy in a Burkean mould, and the reader is left in no doubt that Adeline's marriage is not the blessed state of harmony which the conservative writer would propound.

Carol Howard recently investigated how the desires and actions of both Glenmurray and Berrendale work against Adeline in some way.<sup>70</sup> Howard's analysis of the relationship between Adeline and Glenmurray focuses on the pineapple incident (p.135 and ff.). This occurs as Glenmurray is terminally ill, and when the pair are very short of money. Seeking a treat for Glenmurray, and with only three guineas in her pocket, Adeline sees a pineapple, but decides it is too

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<sup>70</sup> Carol Howard, 'The Story of the Pineapple: Sentimental Abolitionism and Moral Motherhood in Amelia Opie's *Adeline Mowbray*' in *Studies in the Novel*, 30, 3 (1997), pp.355-376.

extravagant and buys him grapes instead. On her return she tells him of the pineapple.

‘A pine-apple!’ said Glenmurray languidly turning over the grapes, and with a sort of distaste putting one of them in his mouth, ‘a pine-apple! – I wish you had bought it with all my heart.’ (p.136)

Glenmurray continues to ignore the grapes and verbalise about the pineapple, that icon of luxurious living in the eighteenth century. Howard sees this incident as a manifestation of ‘the masculine desire for food and the consumption of luxury’ which she contrasts with Adeline’s frugality and self-denial.<sup>71</sup> In this respect, she claims, Glenmurray is not so different from Berrendale and O’Carrol, the characters most given to the satisfaction of their appetites. Howard points out that this urge to consume is located by Opie in the masculine gender; further, that it signifies a cultural attitude. She sees the pineapple representing ‘what Opie considers Britain’s selfish and irresponsible consumption of the literal and metaphysical fruits of other lands’.<sup>72</sup> She supports this view by pointing to other evidence in Opie’s work, notably the poem ‘The Black Man’s Lament, or How to Make Sugar’. Howard is thus prepared to read Opie as propounding an abolitionist view, clearly more philanthropic than conservative and more in keeping with the liberal views of the 1790s than the neo-conservatism of the early nineteenth century.

Another manifestation of Opie’s critical view of society is her

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p.359.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p.360.

portrayal of its hypocrisy and double standards. Adeline's story is told with a bitterness towards the public's inability to understand, much less forget, and its inclination to act viciously in the prurient name of morality. As Mrs Beauclere, the wife of the village doctor, tells Adeline when she informs her that she is withdrawing her child from the school:

“I should consider your example as a warning to all young people; and to preserve my children from evil, I should only wish them to hear your story, as it inculcates most powerfully how vain are personal graces, talents, sweetness of temper, and even active benevolence, to ensure respectability and confer happiness, without a strict regard for the long-established rules for conduct, and a continuance in those paths of virtue and decorum which the wisdom of ages has pointed out to the steps of everyone.” (p.170)

This is the moral warning of the tale. Its heightened language, careful syntax and extended sentence-length is at variance with Opie's often skilful handling of natural, extemporaneous conversation. It is hard to envisage such a polished statement ever being spoken spontaneously by anyone, which is the convention the twentieth-century reader expects, although not every eighteenth-century writer followed. The piece is thus elevated from the narrative to greater significance, while remaining embedded in it. Its development is measured and authoritative, reminiscent of a prepared speech such as a sermon, and it is delivered by a female character who has no other function in the novel. It is the voice of the righteous conservative, and it condemns. Mrs Beauclere is the type of 'evolving, but stable figure from

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bourgeois ideology' that Mary Poovey has called 'the Proper Lady'. This person Poovey describes as someone possessing 'sufficient cultural authority', which, as the doctor's wife in a lonely Cumberland village, Mrs. Beauclere does. Poovey is discussing the woman writer, but her words are appropriate to Adeline's situation when she is attempting to run a village school: 'What she could not do was to flee the Proper Lady's shadows.'<sup>73</sup>

The remaining characters in this study of the pattern of contrasts and pairings in the tale are those of Adeline's Black servant Savannah and her son, the tawny boy. These contrast with the other servant character, Mary Warner, in that where she is self-seeking, judgemental to the point of malice, compromises her own sexual integrity, and abandons Adeline at a time of need, Savannah and her son are constant and devoted attendants, even to the point of Adeline's death. As we have seen in other representations of Black people in Opie's fiction, this is a positive presentation of virtues of loyalty, honesty and generosity, and these qualities are particularly evident when contrasted with those of Mary Warner.

Two critics have written recently on the relationship between Adeline Mowbray and Savannah. Ann Mellor writes that 'Savannah consistently speaks Black English while her educated son speaks Standard English', and accuses Opie of endorsing a view that

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<sup>73</sup> Poovey, p.vii.

'Standard English' is a superior discourse to Black English.<sup>74</sup> This comment appears misguided, to say the least. First, the tawny boy's speech is accurately depicted as normalising to the prevailing English dialect, except for the early scenes when he speaks baby-talk. His mother's speech retains characteristics of her native dialect. Not only is this usually the case, but it also reflects Opie's accurate observation of this phenomenon. Second, Mellor's suggestion that Opie, by her accurate depiction of linguistic difference between Savannah and her son in some way indicates that she is endorsing a view of the innate superiority of so-called 'standard English' seems to be an example of a transference of twentieth-century attitudes to a past time, for the equal valuing of each variety of the language is a recent concept. Opie, I suggest, is merely depicting her characters' respective styles of discourse as accurately as she can in the interests of characterisation, without attempting to suggest the superiority of one dialect form over another.

Carol Howard also discusses aspects of Savannah's relationship with Adeline. She sees Adeline's buying-off of Savannah's husband's debt as representing 'an idealised and nostalgic relationship of ... fealty between two women.'<sup>75</sup> Howard sees this transaction as indicative of Opie's political objective in writing, namely the provision of 'a melioristic rather than revolutionary solution to both the problem of

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<sup>74</sup> Anne Mellor, 'Am I Not a Woman and a Sister?: Slavery, Romanticism and Gender' in Richard & Hofkosh *Romanticism, Race and Imperial Culture 1780 – 1834* (Bloomington: U. Indiana, 1996), p.323.

<sup>75</sup> Howard, p.356.

slavery and the problem of marriage'.<sup>76</sup> The justification for this argument is contextual: Howard points to the cautious political atmosphere in 1805 and suggests how, as a result of it, abolitionism, which had been an active cause in 1780-1792, became a secondary issue in the light of the prosecution of the war with France and the consequent fear of invasion. However, the connection of British women with slavery was established by Mary Wollstonecraft's observation that ' [Women] may well be convenient slaves, but slavery will have its constant effect, degrading the master and the object dependant.'<sup>77</sup> A further connection between Opie and Wollstonecraft is established in the relationships between Adeline and Berrendale – and in some respects, Glenmurray – and Savannah to Adeline. Both women from a financial point of view have little choice but to serve, but whereas Adeline does so from a sense of the duty incumbent with marriage, Savannah gives her mistress a wholehearted devotion, based what Howard identifies as 'fealty'.

Contrary to Marilyn Butler's view, expressed in 1975, that Opie's work was a 'striking example of the insidious spread of reaction',<sup>78</sup> Howard goes on to say that *Adeline Mowbray* 'clearly betrays a lingering affection for the proponents of the now dormant liberal philosophies.'<sup>79</sup> These two opposing views indicate how ways

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p.354.

<sup>77</sup> Wollstonecraft, *Vindications of the Rights of Women*, p.5.

<sup>78</sup> Butler, 1975, p.121.

<sup>79</sup> Howard, p.357.

of reading the text have moved over the last twenty-five years to be more aware of the multiplicity of ideological positions from which a writer such as Opie could write.

To sum up, a study of the characters in the novel reveals some interesting contrasts and combinations. The positive and beneficial influences on Adeline, other than those of Glenmurray, come from three figures who certainly do not represent the establishment: a liberal, pro-revolutionary doctor, a zealous Quaker and a Black servant. The destructive influences come from the different ranks of society, but all hold conventional values and these destructive forces arise through bigotry, sexual adventuring, malice, meanness and ignorance. It is difficult to reconcile these aspects with the idea of a wholly conservative writer writing uncritically of established mores and values and attacking only the radical and unorthodox. Rather, it indicates the complexity of radical discourse at this time and, following the collapse of support for the French Revolution in England, a growing recognition of the need to combine idealism with realism, as Dr. Norberry and Mrs. Pemberton do.

The prevailing critical reaction to *Adeline Mowbray* has tended to be dismissive, seeing the work as, in Marilyn Butler's words, 'the usual cautionary tale of the anti-Jacobins'.<sup>80</sup> This view is echoed by other writers such as Matthew Grenby, who discusses *Adeline Mowbray* in the light of remarks on marriage by Godwin in *Political Justice*, where he had written that the 'abolition of marriage will be

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<sup>80</sup> Butler, p.121.



attended with no evils'.<sup>81</sup> Grenby claims that Opie and other writers

contrived to imbue this speculation with such significance that it could serve as the peg on which all their attacks on Jacobinism could hang. In doing so they utterly denied the new philosophy the status of a cogent political philosophy, and rendered it many times more vulnerable to attack.<sup>82</sup>

In this analysis, both Butler and Grenby seem to be restating the earlier judgement made by Claire Tomalin in her biography *The Life and Death of Mary Wollstonecraft* (1974). Tomalin pulled few punches when describing her view of the relationship between Opie and Wollstonecraft:

Another of Mary's Dissenting friends, Amelia Alderson, turned against her with distinctly malicious enthusiasm. Here there were personal motives at work: in May 1798 she married John Opie, and she may have felt sensitive about the fact that he was a divorced man, that he had once been an admirer of Mary's, and that he and Godwin had also been close friends.<sup>83</sup>

Tomalin supports her view of Opie's motives for attacking Wollstonecraft with such malice by quoting from *Father and Daughter*, where Opie is discussing the reaction of society to unmarried mothers. The excerpt and Tomalin's comments are worth examining in their entirety. Opie writes:

It is the slang of the present day, if I may be allowed this vulgar but forcible expression, to inveigh bitterly against society for excluding from its circle, with unrelenting vigour, the woman who has once transgressed the salutary laws of chastity; and some brilliant and persuasive writers of both sexes have

<sup>81</sup> Godwin, *Political Justice*, 2, p.852.

<sup>82</sup> Grenby, p.20.

<sup>83</sup> Tomalin, p.293.

endeavoured to prove that many an amiable woman has forever been lost to virtue and the world, and become the victim of prostitution, merely because her first fault was treated with ill-judging and criminal severity.<sup>84</sup>

In the excerpt, Opie is describing the view of society at large, and the ostracism which the unmarried mother endured. Tomalin, however, sees this as ‘a direct hit at her old friend’s views’, and Opie’s words as a defence of the system of patriarchy.<sup>85</sup> She admits that, in the wake of Godwin’s *Memoirs*, women writers had to distance themselves from Wollstonean radicalism if they were to be published at all, but interprets this as shameful desertion by Opie: ‘Mrs Opie set to work on a series of novels designed to make her own respectability absolutely clear’.<sup>86</sup> Tomalin’s reading of *Adeline Mowbray* seems flawed, first because of her misunderstanding of motive; second because of her ignoring the coded delivery of the more radical aspects of the tale; third, because she reads the tale as though it were centred on Wollstonecraft.

Where my analysis differs fundamentally from that of Tomalin is on the issue of intended malice. Tomalin writes that

*Adeline Mowbray* was a travesty of the story of Godwin and Mary [Wollstonecraft], but there is no doubt that it used their experience and held them up to ridicule for their theoretical rejection of marriage.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Amelia Opie, *Father and Daughter* (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees and Orme, 1801), p.93.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

Tomalin's choice of words conveys her disapproval of Opie's novel: 'travesty' is a potent term. It is very difficult to see why Tomalin feels that Opie's tale 'held them up to ridicule' when the prevailing sentiments in the treatment of the protagonists are pathos and empathy. Where ridicule is employed, it is to satirise chauvinistic males such as O'Carroll and Langley. Tomalin continues: 'it is hard to forgive Amelia Opie for the cool way in which she thus made use of the woman who had certainly done her no harm.'<sup>88</sup> In making such statements, Tomalin, it seems, falls into a trap spied by Jeanette Winterson, namely that *Adeline Mowbray* is not 'a moral tale about women who thought they were clever enough to live outside society.'<sup>89</sup> Winterson takes the opposite view to Tomalin and her followers, namely that Opie's tale has those elements which make it radical fiction and rejecting the idea of *Adeline Mowbray* as a moral tale, for, she claims, 'it makes no moral judgements'.<sup>90</sup> Moral judgements are made in the tale: Mrs Pemberton, Dr. Norberry, his wife and daughters, Mrs. Beauclere and even Mary Warner and Langley exercise their moral views about Adeline at various points in the narrative. This is not quite the same, however, as the tale itself setting itself up as a work of moral judgement, and in that respect Winterson is quite right. The impact of the tale runs counter to moral judgementalism and seeks to broaden the reader's moral perspective rather than restrict it.

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Mrs. Opie, *Adeline Mowbray: the Mother and Daughter*, ed. Jeanette Winterson (London: Pandora, 1986), p.viii.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., pp.vi and vii.

Winterson foregrounds the common cause made by several writers in the immediately post-Revolutionary years with the French Revolution itself, pointing out that ‘there were many such figures ... who liked to say that personal and virtuous choices were more important than arbitrary and restricting social codes’, clearly including Opie among these.<sup>91</sup> After reviewing how Adeline’s upbringing is in the nature of a social experiment by her mother, Winterson presents a succinct outline of Adeline’s predicament with the dichotomy between Glenmurray’s philosophy and his own life in a way which highlights the same dichotomy in Godwin: ‘Glenmurray ... goes on pestering her to marry him, which is a bit of a blow for an ardent young woman who thought she’d met a genuine freethinker’ (p.vi). The tension she indicates between a woman’s constancy and a man’s ambivalence is not only one of literature’s central motifs, but also a main site of feminist criticism, and therefore a potent device for establishing common cause between women then and women now. It is worth noting Winterson’s summative remarks and her sharpness of observation regarding the gloss put on the tale on its reissue in 1844:

This witty, sharp and ultimately painful novel is not a moral tale; it is challenging in the way Mary Wollstonecraft is challenging, in the way much bluestocking writing at this time challenged male assumptions. ... When this novel was reissued in 1844, the Victorians, not surprisingly, decided to read it as a moral tale.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p.v.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p.viii.

On turning to the reissued edition, we discover a page entitled ‘Opinions of the Press’, which extracts reviews of *Adeline Mowbray* and other works by Opie.<sup>93</sup> These emphasise Opie’s ‘charm’ and her work’s ‘pathos’ and ‘melancholy tenderness’. Nothing here has any hint of radicalism: in contrast to Winterson’s emphasis on Opie’s ideas, it is feelings which are foregrounded. The tale is thus denatured into the same moralistic writing which Opie herself, as a Quaker, had been producing in the 1820s and 1830s, and which her readers were therefore predisposed to expect.

More recent views of Opie’s work, particularly *Adeline Mowbray*, see it in terms of a dualism. There is a historical precedent for this that is contemporary with Opie herself: that of Sir James Mackintosh, who glimpsed what Gary Kelly has called the ‘unofficial’ text in the ‘official’ one. Mackintosh writes:

Mrs Opie has pathetic scenes, but the object is not attained; for the distress is not made to arise from the *unnuptial* union itself; but from the opinions of the world against it; so that it may as well be taken to be a satire on our prejudices in favour of marriage, as on the paradoxes of the sophists against it.<sup>94</sup>

Kelly, writing in 1981, advances the view that ‘the reader who wishes to find in the “official” text a covert subversive text may certainly do so.’<sup>95</sup> He continues

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<sup>93</sup> Mrs. Opie, *Adeline Mowbray* (London: Longman, Brown, Green & Longmans, 1844), flyleaf, unpaginated.

<sup>94</sup> R. J. Mackintosh, *Life of Sir James Mackintosh* (London: Moxon, 1832), 2 vols., 1, p.155.

<sup>95</sup> Kelly, 1981, p.11.

there is enough evidence from women's – and men's – letters and diaries, as well as their novels, to incline one to believe that such a secret readership could and did exist, a readership who could see a model relationship between woman and man in the relationship between Adeline and Glenmurray.<sup>96</sup>

This is to posit Opie as something more than simply a conservative writer, contrary to the earlier judgements of Tomalin and Butler, since to perform the 'unofficial' reading of the text, as hinted at by Mackintosh, is to foreground the happy and loving relationship enjoyed by Adeline and Glenmurray and contrast it with the misery and humiliation she endures with Berrendale, rather than focus on the deathbed acknowledgement that in cohabiting so contentedly she has erred. It would be very difficult to make this 'unofficial' reading of any text without such 'unofficial ideology' being written into it.

Kelly, continuing his exploration of 'official' and 'unofficial' readings, is discussing Lady Caroline Lamb's *Glenarvon* (1816) when he observes: 'The novel appears to argue that the individual, private, passionate "woman's" world of experience must be sacrificed to social, public and conventional patriarchal standards if there is a conflict between the two.'<sup>97</sup> This seems to anticipate Winterson's remark about 'personal and virtuous choices' in the face of 'arbitrary and restricting social codes'.<sup>98</sup> It is clear that his words could apply equally well to a reading of *Adeline Mowbray*. It also seems apparent that a reader of the late-eighteenth/early-nineteenth century looking for

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p.17.

<sup>98</sup> Winterson, ed., p.v.

an 'unofficial' ideology in a work fiction of the time would be aware that the radical aspects of the narrative would have to be set in a frame of conventionality by the writer, in order to be publishable. To do this effectively would require the use of a subversive code of language and other signs. As Patricia Ingham points out,

Every stage of the development of a society has its own special and restricted circle of items which alone have access to that society's attention and which are endowed with evaluative accentuation by that attention. Only items within that circle will achieve sign formulation by that attention and become objects in semiotic communication.<sup>99</sup>

The process of creating new signs within a language is continuous, but especially prevalent when its creators identify themselves as a persecuted or vulnerable section of society, as radicals are wont to do. In view of this, if we accept Sir James Mackintosh's verdict on *Adeline Mowbray* only at face value, the message is that he is aware that there is a new manipulation of language and novelistic convention occurring within the tale, but that he doesn't fully understand it. A more likely reading of Mackintosh is that his evaluation is similarly coded: the phrase 'it may as well be' suggests a hint that he knows full well what the radical implications of the tale are, but, for reasons of prudence connected with his position, he must not indicate to the world at large that he is aware of the unofficial discourse in the tale for reasons of risking social censure. The function of coded discourse is to communicate to others who know the code that the speaker is one of them, but to obscure this fact to those who

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<sup>99</sup> Patricia Ingham, *The Language of Gender and Class* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.2.

are not. It is not difficult to suppose that such a coded discourse existed in Britain at the time in question, when even the ancient protection of *habeas corpus* had been suspended by a repressive government, and when a respectable provincial doctor burned his daughter's letters from London for fear of entrapment. Mackintosh – like Opie – seems to have moved easily among circles of both establishment and non-establishment figures, and if anyone could successfully negotiate the two positions, it would be he.

Eleanor Ty, writing in 1993, mentions some non-conservative aspects of the tale, concluding with the comment that 'while Opie *seems to be* ridiculing Adeline's false notions, she reveals at the same time the inadequacy and folly of conventional moral judgement.'<sup>100</sup>

My italics point out the delightful possibilities suggested by Kelly of a coded and radical text, and this in turn suggests that earlier critics such as Butler and Tomalin may have depended on too literal a reading in order to arrive at their classification of this novel as conservative or even malicious. Ty explains that

A number of recent scholars have pointed out that the two camps, whose views seemed diametrically opposed, in fact shared many concerns and employed comparable techniques to propagate their beliefs.'<sup>101</sup>

However, Ty is able to draw a distinction between the two sets of writers that she identifies:

the essential difference between the more moderate writers and the radical novelists of the 1790s is the

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<sup>100</sup> Ty, 1993, p.29.

<sup>101</sup> Ty, 1993, p.4.



willingness of the latter to carry out the implications of their perceptions to the fullest. Wollstonecraft, Hays and Inchbald would not have let their heroines be rescued quite as fortuitously as did Radcliffe, who thereby diminished somewhat the political ramifications of the novel.<sup>102</sup>

The issue of a full commitment to a radical idea is a significant criterion in terms of *Adeline Mowbray*. Adeline, it must be said, renounces her earlier attitude against marriage before she dies. She is not 'rescued' however, in the sense of escaping the fate which her *hubris* has ascribed for her: she dies a martyr to philosophical absolutism. Throughout most of her life she has steadfastly carried out 'the implications of her perceptions to the fullest', and these perceptions are certainly radical, yet she is not a Jacobin, and neither is she Opie's vehicle for an assertion of female sexuality. These variations, first from our expectations of the conservative novel, then from our expectations of the radical novel again indicate how difficult it is to restrict our classification to this simple binary choice.

The central question regarding the radical nature of this novel should be whether or not Opie challenges the notion of the benevolent patriarchy and its institutions. This notion centres around Burke and his insistence on the patriarch as head of the household. As Ty points out, his association of the political with the familial can be seen from his remarks in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), particularly when he describes the capture of the French royal family.<sup>103</sup> Alongside Burke can be placed other, more extreme voices

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<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p.26.

<sup>103</sup> Burke, pp.69-71.

of rabid reactionist, anti-Jacobin, anti-female, pro-patriarchy sentiments such as Rev T J Mathias's 'The Pursuits of Literature' (1794) and Rev Richard Polwhele's 'The Unsex'd Females' (1798).<sup>104</sup>

The latter verse invites the reader, presumably male, to

Survey with me, what ne'er our fathers saw,  
A female band despising NATURE'S law,  
As 'proud defiance' flashes from their arms,  
And vengeance smothers all their softer charms.<sup>105</sup>

Such polemic verses expressed the views of a widely-held reactionary mindset at the time. These attacks on radical women writers therefore obliged them to resort to subversive textual ambiguity of the kind we have seen above. Eleanor Ty, in writing of Ann Radcliffe, once more presents the equivocal characteristics of her work:

Like Edgeworth and Opie, Radcliffe seems to be writing on the side of the anti-Jacobins or the conservatives, but her romances can be read as attempts to subvert or challenge the notion of the benevolent patriarchy and the ideological construction of the docile, delicate eighteenth-century woman.<sup>106</sup>

Of significance here is the nature of the radical solutions offered to resolve Adeline's dilemma: a working-together of religious Dissent and benign radicalism, as discussed above. Not only is this reminiscent of Amelia Opie's own upbringing in Norwich, but it also has to be seen against preconceived ideas of radicalism that exist in our time. Some critics, indicated above, seem to perceive the notion of radicalism to

<sup>104</sup> T. J. Mathias, *Pursuits* (London: J. Owen, 1794), unpaginated; Rev. R. Polwhele 'The Unsex'd Females' in V. Jones, ed., p.186.

<sup>105</sup> Polwhele, ll.11-14, in Jones, ed., p.186.

<sup>106</sup> Ty, p.23.

mean only Jacobinism, quite forgetting other strands of thought and action which were of service in enabling women's writing, and the consequent task of recognising and evaluating that writing. Kathryn Sutherland clearly felt the same difficulty with this polarised view when, in her discussion of Hannah More, she pointed out that More has been 'long stigmatised as the enemy of women's rights [but now] is being re-evaluated in the context of a more historically sensitive notion of female assertiveness.'<sup>107</sup>

The two ideologies put forward in the novel, religious Dissent and radical philosophy, both contributed to the development of democracy and the establishment of greater equality for women during the nineteenth century. Quakers and Unitarians promoted the establishment of women's colleges, such as Bedford College and Queen's. The democratic reformism of Dr Norberry was to be successful in producing change, both in the capitalist nexus of employment and the passing, eventually, of the Married Woman's Property Acts of 1870 and 1884, which served to make the institution of marriage something less of an irrational choice for women. Significantly, what was achieved by the Jacobin radicalism of Godwin, Wollstonecraft and others is less easily established, despite the retrospective appeal of many of their ideas.




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<sup>107</sup> Sutherland in Everest, ed., p.31.

## CHAPTER 5

**The Prose of the Middle Years, 1806 - 1822**

**A**melia Opie was adept at recognising the changing tenor of the new century and moulding both her writing and her identity to express some of its complexities. In the mid-1790s she had appeared as a radical and had written pro-revolutionary prose and verse. In the days of *détente* surrounding the Treaty of Amiens she had held a salon wherein English and French, radicals and *anciens* had met.<sup>1</sup> During these middle years of her life and writing she constructed her writing to embody the notion of what Carol Howard calls the ‘neo-conservatism’ of the new century.<sup>2</sup> Janet Todd similarly refers to the new mood as ‘the triumph of conservative values’.<sup>3</sup> Contemporary expressions of this ideological shift were made both by Amelia Opie in a letter dated 22 January 1807 to Sir James Mackintosh at Bombay, and by Mackintosh in a letter to Mrs. John Taylor dated 10 October 1808. Opie wrote of ‘The awful, the *cruel* changes in the political world here’.<sup>4</sup> Mackintosh expressed his sympathy for Mrs Opie on her widowhood and added a comment which nicely summarises intellectual and liberal contemporary attitudes: ‘The dreadful

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<sup>1</sup> See MacGregor, p.29 and ff.

<sup>2</sup> Howard, p.359.

<sup>3</sup> Catherine Macaulay, ‘Letters on Education’ (1790) in Todd, ed., 1996, 4, forenote, unpaginated.

<sup>4</sup> Amelia Opie to Sir James Mackintosh, 22 January 1807; British Library, Add Mss 52451b, ff.133-135.

disappointment of the French Revolution, and the reaction of the general mind produced by it, have made many things unpopular besides liberty.’<sup>5</sup>

With her need to write for the contemporary market in mind, it is therefore unsurprising to find that, in this middle period, most of Opie’s works, particularly the short tales, have conservative narrative modes, plot structures and moral bases. These formal elements, however, propel characters through situations and conflicts which cover a range of ideological positions from endorsements of hegemonic patriarchal values of obedience to the law of the father (‘The Black Velvet Pelisse’, ‘On Bringing Up Children’, ‘The Two Sons’, for example) to representations of confident, articulate and democratically-minded womanhood such as that of Lucy Merle in *Valentine’s Eve* (1816). Again, while many of the plots of her tales depict conservatively-constructed mores, she strained the tolerance of some of her more moralistic readers with others: the frosty reception of *Valentine’s Eve* by her spiritual mentor Joseph John Gurney (1788 – 1847), who found that the work had alluded to ‘things not to be named, especially by a woman’, is a case in point.<sup>6</sup> There are sufficient non-conservative elements in these tales to suggest Opie’s less-than-wholehearted embrace of the conservative values that her other tales

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<sup>5</sup> Mackintosh, 1, p.439.

<sup>6</sup> Amelia Opie to William Hayley, 28 February 1816 and 3 May 1816; Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

adumbrate, reflecting the tensions of the ideological complexities of these years.

Opie's tales were far from unpopular, as her publisher's records and her table of earnings will testify.<sup>7</sup> Following the death of her husband, her financial survival was to rely much more on her viability and success as a popular writer. This is evident from her correspondence: for example, a letter to her lawyer, William Chisholm, dated 28 November 1809 records her consternation at learning how little she had been left with after John Opie's estate had been wound up.<sup>8</sup> Much of Opie's writing during the twenty years between the publication of *Adeline Mowbray* in 1805 and her admission to the Society of Friends in 1825 was geared to the prevailing market: stolid, predictable and moralistic. It achieved what Mary Mitford, writing of *Madeline*, referred to as a 'plum-pudding' quality:

So much common sense (for the flour); so much vulgarity (for the suet); so much love (for the sugar); so many songs (for the plums); so much wit (for the spices); so much fine binding morality (for the eggs); and so much mere mawkishness and insipidity (for the milk and water wherewith the said pudding is mixed up).<sup>9</sup>

The non-conservative features which some of her characters, such as Lucy Merle, occasionally present, especially when they are in conflict with the *ancien regime* of aristocratic patronage, reveal a more questioning gaze which has its roots in the bourgeois identities of the

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<sup>7</sup> See Appendices A and B, pp. 339-340, below.

<sup>8</sup> Amelia Opie to W. Chisholm, Lincoln's Inn, 28 November 1809; Pforzheimer Collection, New York Public Library.

<sup>9</sup> R. Brinley Johnson, ed., *Letters of Mary Russell Mitford* (London: Bodley Head, 1925), p.170.

Dissenting classes to which she belonged. The Dissenters, obliged to distance themselves from sympathy with France, found a social legitimacy in the manufacturing trades of the new century. Ruth Watts points out how the Dissenters were predominantly of the middle ranks of society, and how they began to see themselves as a distinct 'class', a lexical innovation when the terms in general use were 'rank' or 'sort'.<sup>10</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* gives an early usage for this meaning dated 1772, with other usages appearing early in the nineteenth century. Further, this 'middle class' saw itself as, in the words of P.J. Corfield, 'the golden mean', 'the most virtuous, most enlightened, the most independent part of the community'.<sup>11</sup>

Hobsbawm describes the fortunes of these manufacturing and professional middle-classes as 'buoyant' at this time.<sup>12</sup> Clark similarly describes the restructuring of wealth in England showing the steady growth of families having an income of at least £700 p.a. at the expense of the 'traditional elites'.<sup>13</sup> He claims that this was not a new hierarchical pattern, but rather wealth 'flowing into the hands' of this new bourgeoisie.<sup>14</sup> It is to this class that Opie herself belonged. Her protagonists, for the most part, continued to be drawn from the lesser gentry, the traditional source for sentimental fiction. Exceptions to this

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<sup>10</sup> Watts, 1998, p.35.

<sup>11</sup> P.J. Corfield, 'Class by name and number in eighteenth-century Britain' *History*, 72 (Feb. 1987), pp.55-6.

<sup>12</sup> Hobsbawm, p.40.

<sup>13</sup> Clark, p.72.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.71.

generalisation include Lucy Merle in *Valentine's Eve* (1816), Opie's articulation of a lower-middle-class woman from a republican background asserting herself in a more high-ranking milieu. The Orwells of *Temper* (1812) also represent artisan-class frugality and combined with moral integrity.

The range of Opie's writing reflects shifts and realignments in English society and culture as the clearer polarisations of the 1790s elided into complex and contradictory patterns at the beginning of the new century. In concluding his study of the Jacobin novel, Gary Kelly writes of the contradictions of this time, pointing out that,

just as the French Revolution proclaimed itself to embody the Enlightenment at the same time that it inverted most of the principles of the Age of Reason, so romanticism in England both absorbed and rejected English Jacobinism as the domestic manifestation of the Revolutionary spirit.<sup>15</sup>

In a later publication, Kelly expands on this collusion of contradictory ideological positions and comments that

In the 1800s and 1810s ... some novelists, such as Maria Edgeworth, Amelia Opie, Elizabeth Hamilton and Hannah More, devised new techniques of formal realism and focussed on supposedly 'ordinary' characters in everyday settings experiencing commonplace events, thereby suggesting that the public political sphere was remote from 'reality' as lived by most people.<sup>16</sup>

Many of the characters in Opie's writings are unremarkable in themselves or the situations in which they are depicted, in keeping with

<sup>15</sup> Kelly, 1976, p.269.

<sup>16</sup> Gary Kelly, 'Religion and Politics' in *The Cambridge Companion to Jane Austen* ed. by E Copeland & J McMaster (London: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 149-169, p.152.



Kelly's observation. They extend her tendency, seen in *The Dangers of Coquetry* and *Father and Daughter*, to deal in stereotypes, enabling her readers to identify with her characters more readily.

J. Paul Hunter points out that it would be a mistake to imagine that by 1800 novel-reading was confined to the middle classes. Hunter writes that 'Readership of novels extended down the social scale to include not only clerks and tradespeople but also considerable numbers of domestic servants.'<sup>17</sup> He points out that in 1799, with literacy rates of over 60% for males and 40% for females, there were twice as many literate Britons as there had been in 1700. It will be seen that if the natural aspirations of a stratified society are upwards, as Jane West suggested at the time, then writing of the upper bourgeoisie and the lesser gentry will encompass a wide readership that embraces the newly-literate classes.<sup>18</sup> The new *literati* wished to read novels of traditional form and plot: it was up to the writers to explore and help to define what Kelly calls 'a post-Revolutionary social consensus' by manipulating, as Opie does, these traditional components in ways which would reflect the complexity of the ideologies of the new century.<sup>19</sup>

The wars with France had effectively silenced English Jacobinism, although the Dissenters, who had formed a large part of

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<sup>17</sup> J. Paul Hunter, 'The Novel and Social/Cultural History', *The Eighteenth-Century Novel* ed. by John Richetti (London: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p.19.

<sup>18</sup> West, p.3.

<sup>19</sup> Kelly, 1997, p.152.

Jacobin support in 1789, continued to suffer the political and social disadvantages that had rankled in the eighteenth century. As the historian Elie Halévy points out, the Tory government 'had been supported during the greater part of the [Napoleonic] war by the same combination of interests which had formerly supported the Whigs – finance, commerce and industry'.<sup>20</sup> This relationship was succoured by a longstanding governmental commitment to economic growth, despite, as Frank O'Gorman notes, setbacks such as the collapse of the American market.<sup>21</sup> These areas of wealth-generation, however, were not those of the Tory landed gentry. Finance, commerce and industry were often in the control of Whig-supporting 'middle-class Dissenters', who, as O'Gorman remarks, 'were not daunted by the repressive apparatus of the state.'<sup>22</sup> Hobsbawm points out that 'private profit and economic development had become accepted as the supreme objects of government policy. ... Politics were geared to profit.'<sup>23</sup> Crucial to the culture of the assertive 'middle class' is the fact that by 1811 the nascent manufacturing and financial areas of the economy produced nearly twice the wealth of the traditional mainstay of the aristocracy, land ownership and farming.<sup>24</sup> E.P. Thompson referred to the evolution from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries

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<sup>20</sup> Elie Halévy, p.199.

<sup>21</sup> Frank O'Gorman, *The Long Eighteenth Century* (London: Arnold, 1997), p.240.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.250.

<sup>23</sup> Hobsbawm p.31.

<sup>24</sup> Halévy, pp.203-204.

as that of the transition from the 'bread nexus' to the 'wage nexus', summarising the shift from old values of food-production to a market-based economy.<sup>25</sup> An indicator of the recognition of the importance of the growth of these new areas of finance and business is seen in Lord Chancellor Hardwicke's decision of 1761 whereby he recognised what Staves calls 'the arrival of new forms of property like stocks and consols, and then moves ... that stocks and consols should be treated as the equivalent of freehold land' in assessing jointures in marriage.<sup>26</sup>

The remarkable point here is that this nascent sector is precisely that in which the Dissenters and the equally-disadvantaged Jewish population were very well represented. The disenfranchised Dissenting radical had thus become part of the status quo, and therefore sought to achieve radical objectives by reform rather than revolution: the old polarities of the 1790s elided into the beginnings of the great reform movement of the nineteenth century.

Amelia Opie's transition from the Jacobin revolutionist of the days of *The Cabinet* to her position in these middle years as what may be termed a proto-Quaker, when her writing investigates issues of autonomy, morality and respectability, follows these national ideological and economic shifts. Evidence of this conscious re-presentation of her identity is found in various letters, but particularly one written to Archibald Constable, the Edinburgh publisher, in 1817. Her motive in writing was to 'kill a calumny', contradicting the story

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<sup>25</sup> E.P. Thompson, 'Eighteenth Century English Society: Class Struggle Without Class?' *Social History*, 4 (1979), pp.133-166.

<sup>26</sup> *Drury v. Drury* (1760-61), 2 Eden 39 in Staves, p.10.

of her kissing Horne Tooke in open court when his acquittal was announced at the Treason Trials in 1794.<sup>27</sup> She then moves on to state that she first met Helen Maria Williams only in 1802 in Paris, and ‘Mrs Wollstonecraft I only knew first as Mrs Imlay – when she seemed to be the deserted wife of Imlay – subsequently as Mrs Godwin’. Williams’s residence in Paris and active support of the Revolution, and Wollstonecraft’s posing as Imlay’s wife had made both women unequivocally *persona non grata* in England post 1795. Opie’s skill in constructing herself to suit the prevailing ideologies of the day is seldom more clearly seen than in this letter.

This process of ideological shift, according to Kelly, was caused by the collapse of what he terms the ‘Republic of Reason’ and the failure of the ‘Revolution of Fraternity’. He writes that these events

seemed to suggest that men were indeed essentially isolated, and essentially alone. The disintegration of the brotherhood of man in nationalistic wars and resistances ... caused a despondency which was universal, and which may be traced in the progress through dejection of Wordsworth, or the philosophical restlessness of Coleridge. They tried to bolster their crumbling necessitarian philosophy with values they had once rejected.<sup>28</sup>

As wider evidence of the changing times in which Opie lived and attempted to make a living, the Corn Laws of 1804 and 1815 may be seen as examples of legislation by which the small number of landowners, mostly aristocrats, sought to protect their profits against

<sup>27</sup> Amelia Opie to Archibald Constable, 18 September 1817; Brotherton Library, Leeds University: Misc. Letters CONS.

<sup>28</sup> Kelly, 1976, p.264.

the boom-and-bust cycles of the economy, particularly in the post-war 'severe economic dislocation' of 1815.<sup>29</sup>

The English aristocratic ethic, articulated by Edmund Burke in 1790 as 'the spirit of a gentleman and the spirit of religion', was called into question in the early nineteenth.<sup>30</sup> Clark asserts that whereas in the eighteenth century, 'Anglican plebians would have wished to become gentlemen if they could', these aspirations tended to disappear in the early nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, there was a complex interweaving of old money and new.

Opie's life at this time became more influenced by the Gurney family, affluent Quaker bankers of non-aristocratic origins who lived like country gentry on their estates, Earlham Hall and Keswick Hall, south of Norwich, and at Runcton, south of Kings Lynn. Sam Gurney, the millionaire discounteer, acquired Ham House in Richmond.

This social interweaving had its impact on Amelia Opie. Her cousin Edward Alderson, a wealthy lawyer, became ennobled as a Baron. Opie herself cultivated acquaintance with the rich and titled: Lord Bury, Lady Charleville, Lady Cork, for example.<sup>32</sup> This view of an inherently upward mobility is reinforced by Nancy Armstrong, who, after describing a nascent bourgeois class 'in the sense of a permanent, self-conscious urban class in opposition to a landed aristocracy', points

<sup>29</sup> O'Gorman, p.251.

<sup>30</sup> Edmund Burke, p.255.

<sup>31</sup> Clark, pp.92, 93.

<sup>32</sup> See Appendix: Letters of Amelia Opie, esp. to Lady Charleville, 3 June 1810; to James Alderson, 18 July 1814; to J. J. Gurney, 9 August 1815.

out the collusive nature of a class that 'no sooner did one generation of townsmen succeed in business or trade than they sought to revise their status by becoming country gentlemen.'<sup>33</sup> Evidence of these ambitions appeared later in the century as affluent manufacturers and traders constructed lavish country houses for themselves, sometimes with startling combinations of fake mediaevalism and technological modernity.<sup>34</sup>

Opie's writing reflects this social interweaving in that its settings, as with most other fiction of the day, are those environs of the privileged classes, although the Dissenting values of thrift, modesty and personal integrity are often deployed within these settings to produce a more complex picture, especially when members of the artisan classes are presented as more worthy than the corrupted members of the hegemonic elite. One of the most succinct recitals of these Dissenting values in Opie's writing of this period occurs in *Tales of the Heart*: discussing the emigration of two brothers to the United States, she says: 'They carried out with them, besides money, *enterprise, industry, integrity and talents*'.<sup>35</sup> (vol.2, p.203) The italics are hers, and the phrase is a perfect distillation of the values of the

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<sup>33</sup> Nancy Armstrong, 'The Rise of the Domestic Woman' in Armstrong & Tannenhouse, eds., *The Ideology of Conduct* (London: Methuen, 1987), p.101.

<sup>34</sup> See Mark Girouard, *The Victorian Country House* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), esp. pp.148-212.

<sup>35</sup> Amelia Opie, *Tales of the Heart*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, 1820), 2, p.203. Subsequent quotations are from this edition, and page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

enterprise culture of the early nineteenth century. The brothers prospered.

Patricia Michaelson, in her study of Opie's use of language, remarks that it is at this time,

and especially in the series of letters written in the 1814 season, that Opie represents speech in ways that violate bourgeois norms for women... She depicts a salon culture in which wit and repartee are privileged.<sup>36</sup>

It is not difficult to find examples of this violation of the norms of female speech. Her letters to William Hayley are remarkably forthright and intimate; her letter to J. J. Gurney of 15 August 1815 demands to know what might be 'improper' in reading. To her cousin James Alderson dated 22 June 1814 she writes of her conversation of 'politics, science, literature, morals, church government, infidelity, sects, philosophy, characters' at a dinner given by Sir James Mackintosh.<sup>37</sup> Most of these topics would have been considered improper in mixed company. Michaelson also points out that wit was a contested area for women in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, and to be known as a witty woman threatened one's modesty.<sup>38</sup> Opie, she says, 'seems to be situating herself as a hopeful entrant to the aristocracy' at this time, and Opie's letters of this period certainly foreground persons of title, fashion or influence.

Michaelson's observation foregrounds the realism of Opie's dialogue, which ties in with Patricia Meyer Spacks's emphasis on the

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<sup>36</sup> Patricia Howell Michaelson, p.130.

<sup>37</sup> See Appendix C: Letters of Amelia Opie.

significance of plot in the fiction of this period. Rather than being considered as unrealistic because of dependence on a romance tradition, she sees plot as constructing a cosmology which is 'profoundly realistic – that is, [the characters] speak of the realities of the culture from which they emerge, and are consistently daring in their exploration of formal, psychological and social possibility.'<sup>39</sup> These two observations provide a useful platform for scrutiny of the short tales, concerned as they were with presenting a moral view in a conservative form, in keeping with the appetites of the readership.

Opie's fiction writing of this period foregrounds the individual, and the reader becomes interested in who she or he is rather than what she or he might represent. This solipsism need not be seen as necessarily conservative, however, but merely in keeping with conventional literary modes. As one of her heroines exclaims in *Tales of the Heart*:

My trials have been, and will no doubt continue to be, the trials of thousands of my sex; but the manner in which I acted under them, and their effect on my feelings and character, must be peculiar to myself. (2, p.2)

In the works of this middle period, the familiar Opie heroine – a naïve young woman who, out of intellectual stubbornness (*Adeline Mowbray*), impulsiveness (*Father and Daughter*) or vanity (*The Dangers of Coquetry*) becomes the victim of a sexual adventurer, suffers the opprobrium of society and meets a terrible and premature

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<sup>38</sup> Michaelson, p.123.

<sup>39</sup> Patricia Meyer Spacks, *Desire and Truth* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1990), p.3.



death – is still evident in, for example, *Simple Tales* (1806) and *Temper* (1812). In the latter work particularly, the focus has shifted to include an examination of the actual mechanics of the faulty upbringing which the protagonist experienced as a child and demonstrations of how the upbringing affects the character and behaviour of the adult. This examination also occurred in *Adeline Mowbray*, but there is a fundamental difference in the drawing of the eponymous character in that novel from the protagonists who inhabit the writing of her middle period. Opie presents in *Adeline* a unique, individualised entity, whereas the protagonists of her other tales do not have this uniqueness. In earlier works such as *Father and Daughter* and *The Dangers of Coquetry*, as in later works, Opie was constructing protagonists with whom the young female reader could easily identify as an extension of herself. The difference is that with the later works, as with *Adeline Mowbray*, Opie is mediating between the several different ideologies of the early 1800s.

The principal themes of Opie's short tales are often concerned with female qualities and behaviours. In these cases, they often closely model the conservative values promulgated by conduct books. A relationship between the two kinds of writing exists whereby just as conduct books promulgate certain behaviours, so fiction often indicates the consequences of deviation from the strait paths of rectitude – by, for example, extravagance in 'The Death Bed' (*Tales of Real Life*,

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1813) and 'A Woman's Love' (*Tales of the Heart*, 1820), or unguarded naïvete as in 'The Fashionable Wife' (*Tales of Real Life*).

Opie uses her technique of pairing female characters to produce a story which, as Penny Mahon points out, is evidence of her anti-war feelings.<sup>40</sup> The tale 'The Soldier's Return', published in *Simple Tales*, when the war with France was in progress, tells of a young man, Lewellyn, who joined the army to please his fiancée, Fanny, despite his strongest misgivings about doing so. Fanny was strongly attracted to the soldiers who come to the village, and Lewellyn feared that he would lose her if he did not enlist. Fanny's cousin Mary, however, detests the soldiers. Lewellyn is sent to Holland, where he writes home twice of being involved in fighting. When no further letters are received, he is assumed to have perished. The cousins' subsequent behaviours reveal their true natures: whereas Fanny resumes her flirting with the soldiers in the village, Mary grieves for Lewellyn. Eventually Lewellyn returns, horribly scarred, to find his parents dead and Fanny a camp follower.<sup>41</sup> It is Mary who cares for him, and they eventually marry. Fanny, overcome by remorse, drowns herself.

Mahon points out that there is 'a lack of emphasis on the horrors of war itself' and how 'Opie appears to be foregrounding female responses to the war machine, which polarise around the

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<sup>40</sup> Penny Mahon, 'In Sermon and Story: contrasting anti-war rhetoric in the work of Anna Barbauld and Amelia Opie' in *Women's Writing*, 7, 1 (2000), pp.23-38.

<sup>41</sup> Amelia Opie, *Simple Tales*, 4 vols. (London: Longman, 1806), 1, p.60. Subsequent quotations are from the edition, and page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

resistant in Mary and the complicit in Fanny.’<sup>42</sup> Mahon cites the opening words of the tale, which challenge the reader in a time of a national state of war: “Is war an irremediable evil?” Having identified Opie’s political interests and her fascination with such figures as Napoleon, Wellington Lafayette and Kosciusko, Mahon concludes that Opie was presenting ‘pacifist rather than pacifist’ views in her tale. The fine distinction between these two terms, according to Mahon, is that whereas the pacifist is opposed to all war, the pacifist considers war a ‘conceivable, if distasteful possibility.’<sup>43</sup> She points out that Opie was a member of the Peace Society, founded in 1816, by 1835, although that is several years after the publication of *Simple Tales* and appears to be a statement about her subscription to the tenets of Quakerism at that time rather than the conscious adoption of either of the views Mahon so carefully identifies .

A recurring theme in the short tales, partly illustrated in the depiction of the two female characters in ‘The Soldier’s Return’, is that of woman as commodity. Opie had written on this theme in her earlier tales, and it appears throughout the four collections of short tales. How women represent themselves, and how they are both represented and perceived by others is as part of the prevailing commercial nexus of the times. Like the depersonalised ‘hands’ needed to operate the new machines, women were seen as a commodity, which is to say, having a value which could be calculated in monetary as well as abstract terms. The most striking example of this occurs in ‘The Uncle and Nephew’

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<sup>42</sup> Mahon, p.33

in *Simple Tales*, when Morley fixes a value on his ward Augusta at £30,000 – the sum he feels obliged to offer his nephew to marry her because she can bring nothing to the match other than ‘beauty, temper and accomplishments’ (p.50).

In ‘The Black Velvet Pelisse’ in the same publication, the tension is created because the father of Julia, the protagonist, gives her money to buy this garment so that she may dress to advantage at a social gathering where an eligible young nobleman is expected. Julia, sensitive and educated, gives this money to a poor family. At the social gathering, in which Opie presents a fine depiction of woman as commodity, Julia is embarrassed and her father outraged at her unwillingness to display herself, especially after ‘having squandered so much on your education,’ as he bitterly informs her (vol.1, p.24). However, the education he has purchased has provided Julia with keen sensibility and she receives the admiration of all when the poor family, now decently clad and nourished, come to thank her, just as Adeline Mowbray’s generosity earned her the tireless devotion of Savannah and the Tawny Boy. Opie foregrounds the values of modesty and empathy in this tale at the protagonist’s expense of losing an opportunity for personal display in a group gathered for the purpose of arranging a profitable marriage. In this tale is seen the combining of these Dissenting values, together with the valuing of education, arrayed with the conservative tropes of familial authority and preoccupations with marriageability. Julia does not refuse to attend the

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.35, *fn.*

*levée*, as a radical writer might depict on the basis of endowing the character with a desire for sexual autonomy, although she shows anxiety for the consequences of using the money her father has given her for the pelisse to purchase the freedom of the poor family. Despite this inner conflict, she knows, by virtue of her educated moral integrity that her action is the right one. The tale is therefore ambiguous: the ethos of the charitable lady is a well-established theme of conservative writing. On the other hand, the tale may be seen as depicting radical values of modesty, empathy and generosity in a conservative woman-as-commodity setting. It is more in keeping with the complexities of the times, however, to see the tale as exemplifying a running-together of several ideologies, conservative and dissenting, individuated and collective, along lines described above.

The short tales 'The Death Bed', 'The Fashionable Wife', 'White Lies', 'Proposals of Marriage', 'The Uncle and Nephew' and 'Lady Anne and Lady Jane' all treat aspects of woman as commodity. The last tale mentioned here enlarges this market-led view of femininity by presenting the tension that arises when two women who are cousins and competing for the same man. From our distance, such a blatant treatment of the commodification of femininity is surprising in a writer who has portrayed so many women as victims of the male gaze: Agnes in *Father and Daughter*, Adeline in *Adeline Mowbray*, and Julia in 'The Black Velvet Pelisse'. The ideological complexity of the new century, with its emphasis on the creation of wealth through

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trade and manufacture, is an appropriate context for this articulation of sensibility and desire modulated by the criteria of the marketplace.

The dialogue of wealth and value-given is reflected in the main strand of this tale, which concerns women's dependency on others for money. This is woven in with commodification issues based on appearance and virtue.

The tale begins with two men, father and son, discussing the merits of the titular figures of the tale. Henry Percy – one of Opie's name-borrowings from Shakespeare – comments on the changeable temper of Jane Langley, likening it to the varying colours of her eyes: 'I am sure I know not whether they be gray, blue or hazel ... like a beautiful silk, they are beautiful to the sight without one's being able to tell what is the predominant hue.' His father then replies: 'That may be a recommendation to a mistress, Harry, but surely not to a wife.'<sup>44</sup> He compares her with Anne Mortimer, saying of Anne that she is 'not so dazzling as her cousin, but I think her more estimable' (p.5). In the discussion of woman as consumer durable from which these speeches are extracted, it is clear that the male hegemony is as prevalent as ever. The shameless assertion by a father to his son of taking a mistress demonstrates this, as does the apparently unconscious conflation the men make between appearance and character in the women. The pretty Jane has 'charm' (p.3), but Anne's plainness is presented as betokening greater worth. The whole interchange is reminiscent of the

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<sup>44</sup> Amelia Opie, *Tales of Real Life* (London: Longman, 1813), 3 vols., 1, p.2. Subsequent quotations are from this edition, and page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

way in which Adeline Mowbray is discussed by two young men in the street, one of which then tries to pick her up.<sup>45</sup>

The women themselves reflect this conflation of appearance and character: we quickly see that plain Anne loves Henry with the quiet intensity of the moral woman, whereas pretty Jane merely flirts with him. Anne has ambition to be ‘an independent and rational being’, which might be taken as a statement of progressive Dissenting values, whereas Jane only requires money to support her lavish and narcissistic lifestyle. The dependence of women on men for money is shown when Jane approaches Anne for a loan:

“What I want you to do is, lend me money sufficient to pay some heavy bills.”

“Give you money, you mean, Jane; lending it is out of the question.”

“Indeed it is not; I mean to pay you back every farthing.”

“Yes, no doubt you mean it, - but you will never be able.”

(p.66)

Jane’s extravagance is shown as being learned from her mother, and in this Opie is rehearsing her concerns about parenting that appeared in *The Dangers of Coquetry, Adeline Mowbray, Temper* and other short tales, including others in this publication. Anne informs her,

“My dear Jane, our mothers and our fathers were as different in their habits as you and I are.... I have always felt my affectionate pity for your errors increased by the consciousness that I owe to your mother’s warning example.”

As the tale progresses, Henry marries Jane but Anne, out of love for him, continues to subsidise Jane’s extravagances. However, these are the cause of her untimely end, murdered by the wife of a

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<sup>45</sup> Opie, *Adeline Mowbray*, 1999 ed., p.206.

creditor she has ruined through non-payment. As she dies in the customary Opie tableau, her last act is to join the hands of Jane and Henry. The moral is implied, but clear enough.

Much of Opie's fiction during this middle period of her writing also addresses another construction of woman which overlaps that of the commodity item – that which is called by Armstrong the 'new domestic woman' of the early nineteenth century, partner to the 'new economic man [who] first encroached upon aristocratic culture and seized authority from it'.<sup>46</sup> 'To the qualities of the innocent maiden, [later] conduct books appended those of the efficient wife.'<sup>47</sup> Earlier conduct book writers such as Fordyce (1766) and Gregory (1774) admit the domestic roles of women: Hester Chapone (1773), however, is the first to articulate the need for skills of 'oeconomy', namely the management of financial and human resources, which she describes as 'an art as well as a virtue'.<sup>48</sup> The domestic, interior woman was the counterpart to the exterior man of enterprise. Chapone continues by writing to her Young Lady: 'I hope it will not be long before your mother entrusts you with some part, at least, of the management of your father's house.'<sup>49</sup> Issues of gender and ownership are present here which point to the dispossessed status of women as far as property-ownership was concerned until the reformist governments of

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<sup>46</sup> Armstrong, p.96.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.104.

<sup>48</sup> Hester Chapone, 'Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, Addressed to a Young Lady' in Todd, ed., 2, p.147.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.



the mid-nineteenth century produced the first Married Women's Property Act (1870).

Armstrong summarises the gender roles in such a household as that of the man, 'to accumulate' and for the woman, 'to regulate'.<sup>50</sup> Norbert Elias further points out how this control of domestic economy enabled male dominance to be 'broken for the first time. The social power of the wife is almost equal to that of the husband. Social opinion is determined to a high degree by women.'<sup>51</sup> Elias is taking a long view, but his observation is sound: control of the household can be seen as part of the greater picture of the movement towards female empowerment which, with the aid of an education equal to that of their brothers, will enable young middle-class women to progress to a demand for emancipation by the end of the nineteenth century.

By mid-century this notion of the woman as domestic manager found its full expression in works by both male and female novelists such as the protagonist in *Jane Eyre* (1847) and Esther Summerson in Dicken's *Bleak House* (1853) – a further example of a heroine who is valued for her nature rather than her looks – although it must be noted that both these heroines turn out to be beautiful after all. Opie's heroines offer different representations of this trope of the domestic manager, again showing the validity of the conduct books' prescriptions by detailing instances of their non-observation: Mrs

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<sup>50</sup> Armstrong & Tennenhouse, p.120.

<sup>51</sup> Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, trans. E Jephcott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p.151.

Belmour in 'The Death Bed' is too extravagant in her spending, as is the fashionable wife in the tale of that name and Lady Anne in 'Lady Anne and Lady Jane'. As such, these protagonists offer a contrast to Adeline Mowbray, who manages affairs perfectly well when with Glenmurray but who is then unable to overcome her husband Berrendale's selfishness. Also, Opie's writing becomes increasingly concerned with the correct upbringing of children, and this aspect of domestic management is treated in 'On Bringing Up Children', 'Austin and His Wife', 'The Two Sons', 'Mrs. Arlington' and 'The Uncle and Nephew'. Similarly, the topic received considerable attention in vol. one of Adeline Mowbray. As a growing preoccupation, this childless woman was to write increasingly, and increasingly prescriptively, of child-rearing in her Quaker years: *Illustrations of Lying* and *Tales of the Pemberton Family*, both published in 1825, and *Detraction Displayed* (1828).

Jane West's *Letters to a Young Lady* of 1811 identifies the emergence of the new class and the impact this had on the lives of those it embraced:

The sentiments and regulations [of society] had lately, as far as concerns women, undergone an alarming change, [mainly affecting] that numerous and important body the middle classes of society, whose duties are most complicated, and consequently most difficult, being generally overlooked [by conduct-book writers]; and yet the change in manners among these are so marked that the most superficial observers must be alarmed at the prospect of what it portends.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> West, pp.3-4.

West goes on to indicate the moralistic role that a writer of popular fiction such as Opie should assume:

A popular author is in conscience bound to employ the (perhaps) transient period of public approbation in using her most strenuous endeavour ... to give that turn to the taste and morals of society which would be most beneficial to its ... interests.<sup>53</sup>

She then presents a taxonomy of values for the new 'oeconomic class' in Letter III. While there is no evidence from correspondence that Opie ever read West's work, the themes in her short tales model West's taxonomy of changing values remarkably closely:

<i>West's Taxonomy</i>	<i>Opie's Tales</i>
Female vanity	'The Black Velvet Pelisse', 'Mrs. Arlington', 'The Fashionable Wife'
Misery and guilt of extravagance	'The Death Bed', 'Appearance is Against Her', 'Lady Anne and Lady Jane'
Importance of moral instruction,	'Mrs. Arlington' 'On Bringing Up Children', 'Austin and his Wife', 'The Two Sons', 'Tales of the Pemberton Family'
Luxury injurious to trade and morals	'The Death Bed', 'The Fashionable Wife', 'White Lies'
Effects of conduct of middle classes on the lower orders	'Tales of the Pemberton Family', 'Mrs Arlington', 'The Black Velvet Pelisse', 'White Lies', 'The Uncle and Nephew'

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

Such a close congruence of fiction and conduct-book adumbration confirms not only the public awareness of the emergence of the new bourgeoisie, but also the conformity of readers' behavioural expectations. Opie is clearly basing the themes of these of her short tales on conservative interpretations of the ideologies of the day, even if the outcomes question them. This helps to account for the tales' popularity and also helps to explain why the reviewers of the more literary reviews tended to lose interest in her new publications as time went on. For example, reviewing *Simple Tales*, Opie's first collection published in 1806, the *Edinburgh Review* found that

There is something delightfully feminine in all Mrs O[pie]'s writings; an apparent artlessness in the composition of her narrative ... that gives a powerful effect to the occasional beauties and successes of her genius.<sup>54</sup>

The theme of reinforcing a conservative view of femininity is but barely concealed. This was seen as such a favourable review by the critic of the *Critical Review* that he suggested that Opie wrote it herself.<sup>55</sup> He disagreed with the *Edinburgh Review*, saying that 'Mrs. Opie was of the opinion ... that when once in favour with the public, she had nothing to do but go to sleep.'<sup>56</sup>

By 1820, favourable reviews had become scarce: only the *Scots Magazine* seems to have noticed *Tales of the Heart*, Opie's last collection of short tales. Its reviewer commented that Mrs Opie did not improve 'in the manufacture of her tales ... her great staple was her

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<sup>54</sup> *Edinburgh Review*, 8 (1806), pp.465-471.

<sup>55</sup> *Critical Review*, 8 (1806), p.444.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

pathos and that she seems, pretty nearly, to have exhausted – nor has she much talent for incident or character to make up for it.’<sup>57</sup> The weary negativity of the reviewer is evident. By the time of the publication of her last tale *Madeline* in 1822, her sales had slumped and her earnings declined by two-thirds. It is clear that she was coming to the end of things as far as fiction writing is concerned. In a letter of 1822 to Robert Southey, she claimed that her writing ‘lends its aid, however feeble, to the cause of morals and religion.’<sup>58</sup> The phrase clearly reflects her concern to be seen as a member of the Dissenting middle-class: whether this necessarily identifies her as a conservative *sui generis* is questionable given the mores of the time and her need to write for money.

Before moving to the final phase of Opie’s writing the longer tales from the middle period must be considered, together with other writing from that time. These are: Opie’s Memoir in her husband’s posthumously-published *Lectures on Painting* (1809), her ‘character’ of Mrs. Roberts, *Valentine’s Eve*, *Madeline* and the Gothic tale ‘Love, Mystery and Superstition’ in *Tales of the Heart*.

In 1809, two years after John Opie’s death, Longman’s published by subscription his *Lectures on Painting* delivered at the Royal Academy of Arts. These lectures were part of his duties as Professor of Painting for the last two years of his life. The volume

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<sup>57</sup> *Scots Magazine*, New Series, Edinburgh, 7 (1820), pp152-155.

<sup>58</sup> Amelia Opie to Robert Southey, 10 March 1822; Huntington Library, HM23043.

included tributes by Elizabeth Inchbald, the dramatist and critic Prince Hoare and the president of the Royal Academy, Benjamin West, as well as a lengthy eulogy by Amelia Opie. These flourishes, as well as the publication by subscription, suggest that the venture was to be a financial benefit to his widow as well as a tribute to Opie himself.

There are four pages of subscribers' names, including not only society figures such as the Countess of Cork, names of London radicals and Dissenters such as Samuel Boddington, Dr Disney and Thomas Holcroft; bankers such as the Hoares, the Barclays and the Gurneys; but also many people from Norwich and Norfolk, such as the Taylors, Miss Plumptre (which Miss is not stated), the Martineaus and Thomas Coke, MP.

The contents of Amelia Opie's memoir of her late husband are conventional, praising his painterly skills and his personal attributes. She is at pains to drop names such as those of Holcroft, Inchbald, Hannah More - from whose 'Poem on Sensibility' she quotes, Fox, Coke, Northcote and Thomson, who completed the last of John Opie's canvasses, all thereby increasing Opie's status by association. Several of these names had been clients and sitters for the portraitist.

Of interest in her Memoir is the way in which Opie, one of the more prolific and popular writers of her day, minimises her writing, making it seem little more than a pastime, in contrast to the financial realities of her life. She writes of 'the little power of writing which it

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has been my amusement to cultivate.’<sup>59</sup> This may be no more than the conventional modest disclaimer of the day, although it is cleverly done, for it also by implication connotes her own artistic proclivities. However, minimising one’s occupation in this way reveals how uneasily the public viewed the woman writer. Roger Sales has pointed out how Jane Austen’s nineteenth-century biographers Henrietta Keddie (Sarah Tytler) and Rev. James Edward Austen presented her as ‘a person who was content to be everything to her family and nothing to the world’, even though this seems not to have been the case at all, with Austen vigorously prosecuting her career as a writer.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, Shelley King writes of ‘the extraordinary way in which Amelia seems to have been marketing “Mrs. Opie”.’<sup>61</sup> In this case, her self-marketing technique is to dismiss exactly what she wishes to promote: her writing. This contradiction is an example of the fundamental paradox with which women writers had to deal: namely, to commend the everyday virtue of domesticity over the special talent of writing. Jan Fergus refers to this as ‘the ambiguous cultural status’ of women writers at this time. This helps to explain why both their biographers and the women writers themselves felt that they had to protest their domesticity and were so keen to deny that they had any professional aspirations as a writer. Fergus emphasizes this cultural unease by continuing: ‘Only women who self-consciously presented themselves

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<sup>59</sup> John Opie, *Lectures on Painting* (London: Longman, 1809), p.xi.

<sup>60</sup> Sales, p.3.

<sup>61</sup> Shelley King, Queen’s University, Canada: private communication, 28 June 1999.

to the reading public as deserving cases for charity were authorised to write for money'.<sup>62</sup> This valuing of domesticity over professional endeavour is restated in a shorter 'character' that Opie wrote later for Margaret Roberts' novel *Duty* (1814) and which forms a preface to that tale, in which she says: 'I am most anxious to exhibit her as a wife, that character which is best calculated to call forth the virtues of a woman.'<sup>63</sup> This busy person, wife to Reverend Richard Roberts, the Provost of Eton College, and thus surrogate mother to scores of little boys, is praised by Opie as being 'never idle, never for a moment unemployed' and yet 'though every domestic duty was regularly fulfilled, she seemed, when in the company of her guests, to have nothing to do but to amuse herself and them.'<sup>64</sup> Robert's writing itself is unacknowledged. This construction by Opie of both herself and Roberts is a conservative one in that it follows the values articulated by Burke and others of the benevolent patriarch and the subordinate wife, and yet in keeping with the Dissenting values of domestic industry. Since both prefaces are, in effect, marketing devices to promote the titular work, they can be taken as reflecting the prevailing ideologies of the times. Here is evidence of a collusive characteristic, in which conservative and Dissenting values become indistinguishable from

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<sup>62</sup> Jan Fergus, *Jane Austen: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), p.5.

<sup>63</sup> Margaret Roberts, *Duty* (London: Longman, 1814), p.5.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p.7.



each other and the two women exemplify Poovey's concept of the 'proper lady'.<sup>65</sup>

*Temper, or Domestic Scenes* (1812) was Opie's first full-length piece of prose fiction published in these middle years, of which Brightwell remarks that it was 'a tale in which she diverged from the pathetic style of writing which she had hitherto most affected, and evidently aimed more, in the character of a moralist, at practical usefulness.' Perhaps Opie had been stung by the reviewer's comment to *Simple Tales*.<sup>66</sup> *Temper* does indeed mark a turning point in Opie's writing, reflecting her increasing preoccupation with moralising, particularly regarding child-rearing. Eleanor Ty points out that the work is virtually ignored today.<sup>67</sup> She notes how, 'of those [critics] that have read it, Ann H. Jones says it is the worst novel Opie ever wrote, because it is utterly didactic and told with an absolute lack of artistry.'<sup>68</sup> Despite this, *Temper* was Opie's most popular prose publication after *Father and Daughter*, selling approximately three thousand copies and earning her over six hundred pounds from Longman's. First published in 1812, it ran to three editions and was not remaindered until 1838.

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<sup>65</sup> Poovey, p.27.

<sup>66</sup> Brightwell, p.144.

<sup>67</sup> Ty, 1998, p.161.

<sup>68</sup> See Ann H. Jones, *Ideas and Innovations: Best Sellers of Jane Austen's Age* (New York: AMS Press, 1986), p.59.

Before discussing the work in detail, I should point out that the title bears a resemblance to an earlier, so-called 'Heroi-comic' epic poem 'The Triumph of Temper' by William Hayley (1748-1820), identified by Chan as 'his most successful work'.<sup>69</sup> Hayley and Opie formed a close friendship which seems to have begun with her writing to him to praise the 'Triumphs [*sic*] of Temper' in 1813, and his speedy response in which he salutes her as 'Dear though unseen Amelia'.<sup>70</sup> In a later letter to Dawson Taylor, she recalled:

I became acquainted with Mr Hayley in 1814... I then went to see him and staid with him a whole month nearly tête a tête. I repeated my visit next year...<sup>71</sup>

Hayley subsequently referred to Opie as 'Serena', the name of the heroine of his epic, which in part explores the relationship between Serena and her father, Sir Gilbert. While such exploration is not unusual in fiction of that era, Gilbert displays an ideological ambivalence which is characteristic of the complex ideologies Opie is creating in her fiction of these middle years and which has similarities with *Temper*. In Hayley's epic, Sir Gilbert is a 'faithful Whig' in all aspects of life other than that of his relationship with his daughter, when he 'turned to a Tory', demanding 'passive obedience' from Serena.<sup>72</sup> She, described as 'a lovelier nymph [which] pencil never

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<sup>69</sup> Victor Chan, *Leader of My Angels: William Hayley and His Circle* (Edmonton: Edmonton Art Gallery, 1982), p.74.

<sup>70</sup> Opie to Hayley, 28 January 1813 and Hayley to Opie, 29 January 1813; Add. Ms. 39781 and Add. Ms. 30805 respectively, British Library.

<sup>71</sup> Amelia Opie to Dawson Turner, 17 March 1823; Trinity College Library.

<sup>72</sup> Chan, p.2.

drew', in turn, has her temper tested by Spleen, a monster of such evil power that 'Hell stood aghast'. Her succour is 'Temper, the nurse of Love', and her temper befits her name so well that she finally triumphs.<sup>73</sup>

In her letter to Hayley, Opie wrote that 'Triumphs of Temper' was

one of the first books of poetry which I read aloud to my mother; and, as she judiciously held up its admirable heroine as a model for imitation, the delight which I felt in the beauty of the poem was increased by a consciousness that it pleased me.<sup>74</sup>

The tone of this letter is complimentary, respectful and yet warm. It was to be the first of a lengthy correspondence and friendship between the two. Hayley's prompt reply exhorted her, 'still in the prime of life', to 'fresh literary Exertions'.<sup>75</sup>

Opie's tale is told as continuous narrative, as was *The Dangers of Coquetry* but unlike *Adeline Mowbray*, which enjoyed the convenience of chapter breaks. Despite this, Opie recounts her tale over a span of three generations in order to show the extent of the damage a faulty upbringing can produce, the traumatic nature of the experiences which are met as a result and the reflection and reconstruction necessary to overcome this maladjustment. This transgenerational framing was used by Jacobin writers, notably Elizabeth Inchbald in *A Simple Story* (1791), which, as a retelling of *Winter's Tale* necessarily had a long timespan. The paths of the two

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p.11.

<sup>74</sup> Opie to William Hayley, 28 January 1813.

<sup>75</sup> Hayley to Opie, 29 January 1813.

novels are quite different, however. Inchbald's tale – and Shakespeare's play, and the anonymous Italian romance *Pandosto*, on which the play is based – requires time for Matilda (Perdita in the play), to mature so that the sequence of hubris, nemesis, contrition, penance, forgiveness and reconciliation may be worked out. While this process is entirely in keeping with Inchbald's Roman Catholicism, it is not one with which a Dissenter such as Opie would identify.

Part of the significance of *Temper* is its study of the relationship between society and the individual. In the moralising tradition of Dissenting literature, her purpose is to show the perfectibility of her protagonists following the faulty upbringing of the first of the young women, Agatha. Radicals have two ways with which to attempt their aims, revolution or reform: a transgenerational novel is essentially a reformist construct. No revolutionary insight or sudden epiphany, but a slow process of change, damage-repair, amelioration and – in both *Temper* and *A Simple Story* – reconciliation. Similarly, there are conservative tropes in the moralising in both tales: the exercise of patriarchal power and the objective of a satisfactory marriage, which almost inevitably demands portrayal of the woman as commodity. However, the parameters of radical and conservative simply become unhelpful in evaluating *Temper*, since the work, in keeping with its times, has a more complex pattern, just as Sir Gilbert in Hayley's epic was part Whig, part Tory. In *Temper*, the male character Torrington exercises patriarchal power and yet is an

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enlightened man who recognises the potential of marrying an educated woman in order that she may be ‘a rational companion and the instructress as well as the mother of my children’.<sup>76</sup> This is clearly an articulation of a radical view since it voices the Dissenters’ valuing of female education. The seeming contradiction points the inadequacy of the parameters, and may be explained by referring back to Halevy’s evidence that by this time, the values of the Dissenters had become absorbed into the status quo, just as the Dissenters themselves had been.<sup>77</sup> *Temper* therefore reflects a combining of values previously seen as diverse in the more divergent times of the 1790s.

The foregrounding of the proper education of women and girls is one of the central themes of *Temper*, as it is with *A Simple Story*. The spare and elegant prose style of Inchbald, with its ‘bitterness and concentration of style’ reminded Lytton Strachey of Stendhal.<sup>78</sup> In Inchbald’s final three paragraphs, however, the style becomes much more effusive, like that of Opie, and concludes with the following phrase, capitalized and centred: ‘A PROPER EDUCATION’.<sup>79</sup>

Hobsbawm describes education in England at this time as ‘a joke in poor taste’ when compared to other European countries.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Amelia Opie, *Temper* (London: Longman, 1812) 3 vols., 1, p.103. Subsequent quotations are from this edition, and page numbers are shown parenthetically in the text.

<sup>77</sup> Halevy, p.203.

<sup>78</sup> Elizabeth Inchbald, *A Simple Story*, ed. by Lytton Strachey (London: Henry Froude, 1908), p.v

<sup>79</sup> Inchbald, p.299.

<sup>80</sup> Hobsbawm, p.30.

However, the issue of female education had been popular among writers and *philosophes* from both sides of the polarized social framework during the 1790s. Those in favour tended to be drawn from the Dissenting community, especially the Unitarians, or were heavily influenced by its teaching. A list of such writers would include Mary Wollstonecraft: her *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (1787), *Mary* (1788) and her discussion of education in *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). Although not a Unitarian, Wollstonecraft was heavily influenced by their teaching in her time at Newington Green in 1784, where she mingled with Dissenters such as Richard Price, Ann Jebb and Anna Barbauld.

Despite the shift in liberal intellectual feeling from the 1790s to the ostensibly conservative tenor of the early 1800s, the views expressed in works on the education of middle-class girls are remarkably consistent, with the possible exception of those of Hannah More, who frequently employed very conservative and authoritarian modes of writing addressed to artisan classes, yet who, in the final analysis, was on the side of educating girls.<sup>81</sup> The shared objectives of the other writers were that girls should receive an education equal in content and organisation as that which their brothers enjoyed and that the teaching of science and economics was not wasted on young female minds, as neither was the opportunity to study Greek as well as Latin. Perhaps the reason for this consistency is that these were the views of the Dissenters, especially the Unitarians. In the middle years

of the eighteenth century, Unitarian figures such as Joseph Priestley and David Hartley had established principles which, according to Ruth Watts, 'had become the cornerstone of Unitarian educational thought in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries', and on which, indeed, Mary Wollstonecraft was to draw later.<sup>82</sup> Watts quotes Priestley's comment that 'Certainly, the minds of women are capable of the same improvement and the same furniture as those of men'.<sup>83</sup> At that time, however, these views were distinctly progressive and radical, and emanated from the central tenet of Unitarianism that the two sexes were of equal status and so equivalent educational opportunities should be available, although differing in their content.

By contrast, the establishment view of the education of girls reflected the reactionary belief in a benevolent patriarchy, which saw woman as subordinate to man, weak and in need of protection but a figure of succour for their children, and the pattern of education of girls was developed to propagate this view. Conservative views were articulated in Thomas Gisborne's *Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1798), which asserted that 'God had not given women male powers of close and comprehensive reasoning because men needed such powers for the abstract learning and variety of skilled concerns assigned to them'.<sup>84</sup> There was, therefore, not only little

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<sup>81</sup> Hannah More, 'Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education' in *Works* (London: Cadell, 1830).

<sup>82</sup> Watts, 1998, p.35.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p.20.

point in educating females, but it was also contrary to God's wishes to do so: hence the advice given to women by one Anglican cleric, John Gregory, that 'if you happen to have any learning, keep it a profound secret, especially from the men.'<sup>85</sup> The female role, according to such a view, was to be only amiable and affectionate, and Watts quotes another conduct book of the time which asks 'gentlemen to make more allowance for the imbecility of those who were formed to delight us'.<sup>86</sup>

The establishment of a self-conscious bourgeoisie, with its large component of Dissenters, foregrounded social rank as well as questioning gender roles and expectations. As far as the attribute of temper is concerned, for Opie it is common to all: 'I am convinced that the conduct of the low and the high-born, when under the dominance of temper, is commonly the same; and that temper is the greatest of all levellers, the greatest of all equalisers' (3, p.63). The text here is egalitarian but the context is one of right behaviour – the true or poor temper of the individual. The whole has the boldness of the values of the new century in that it does not assert the militant egalitarianism of a Jacobin, but neither attempts to subordinate the 'low-born' in the way a conservative writer would. The ideology is moral, not hierarchical as was found in *Simple Tales*. This concern with morality is the single important feature whereby Opie's writing of this century, including *Adeline Mowbray*, differs from her earlier work, which, one way or another, was concerned with issues of propriety within a gendered

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.



social hierarchy. The articulation develops: in a later work, *Valentine's Eve* (1816), she was to present a more fully realised view of degrees of morality as being separate from degrees of rank; in *Detraction Displayed* (1828) she dismisses traditional notions of precedence.<sup>87</sup>

Opie takes care to uphold these Unitarian values in her depiction of the education and roles of the three female characters around whom the tale revolves, as she will also in a different way in *Valentine's Eve*. Early in the first volume of *Temper*, the enlightened middle-class paterfamilias Mr. Torrington explains to his wife why he chose to marry her and his explanation, already quoted in part, may be seen as a description of a woman who, the product of a rational upbringing, exemplified the Unitarian model. The full quotation reads:

“If you had been weak and foolish, though young, rich and beautiful, ... I would never have made you my wife. No. I saw in you a woman capable of being a rational companion, and the instructress as well as the mother of my children.” (1,p.9)

Torrington's emphasis on rationality for his wife and children can be clearly differentiated from the conservative paradigm of submissive ignorance indicated above, and comes at a moment when their daughter Agatha has been reprimanded and sent to her room, where she howls her anger. With these words Torrington is restraining his wife Emma from going to her, an instinct which he finds contradictory to the virtues he has just described and dismisses as ‘the puerile tenderness that shrinks appalled at the cries of an angry child’.

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<sup>87</sup> See Amelia Opie, *A Cure for Scandal, or Detraction Displayed* (London: Longman, 1828), esp. ch. 6.

Opie points out that after this reproof, Emma's 'love and reverence for her husband made [her] submissive to his will' (1, p.10).

Opie makes considerable reference in her novel to Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747). Her purpose in doing so is to foreground manners and maxims of polite society, as in volume three, pp.120 and following, but the moment in that work to which she particularly refers is that when Lovelace admonishes the glover's wife for calling her husband into the shop by using his first name.<sup>88</sup> It is the duty of a wife 'not to speak disrespectfully to the being whom she has sworn to honour', she writes, and this is further evidence of her use of a conservative model of marital relations (v.3, p.111). There is something ironic in the writer of *Adeline Mowbray*, the story of a woman damned by society steeped in the double standards of a male hegemony, turning to a libertine character such as Lovelace for her authority in this matter. Eleanor Ty notices the connection and points out the similarities between the two novels:

Like Clarissa Harlowe, Agatha Torrington's confidence in her own judgement leads her to ignore the advice of a parent, and she is whisked away in a chaise by her lover, who subsequently claims sexual favours from her. Though the circumstances are not exactly the same, both Clarissa and Agatha become estranged from their families, and must spend the rest of their lives atoning for their mistake.<sup>89</sup>

It is the exercise of parental firmness such as that displayed by Torrington which, according to Opie, is crucial to the successful upbringing of children. The title page of the book bears an

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<sup>88</sup> Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa*, ed by Angus Ross (London: Penguin, 1985), p.928.

<sup>89</sup> Ty (1998), p.162.

unattributed envoy which makes this clear at the outset: ‘A horse not broken becometh headstrong, and a child left to himself will be wilful.’ This phrase is similar in meaning to the proverbial saying, ‘The best horse needs breaking, and the aptest child needs teaching’.<sup>90</sup> On page two, the author opines that children are similar to lunatics ‘in the power of self-guidance and self-restriction’, while on the following page, she suggests the benefits of early chastisement ‘by judicious and firm control’ rather than later beatings. The overt didacticism on this topic is also met at appropriate points in the development of the plot as the tale progresses. For example, the reader encounters the observation that

Sure it is that Temper – like the unseen but busy subterranean fires in the bosom of a volcano – is always at work where it has once gained an existence .... Parents, beware how you omit to check the first evidences of its empire in your children.  
(1, p.95)

This statement summarises the central thread of the tale. Torrington, the preceptor of parental firmness, dies, leaving his widow Emma to bring up their daughter Agatha in an indulgent manner, so that by the time the girl is in her teens, she has become a tyrant. Agatha’s particular weakness is ‘falsehood’ – lying, a weakness of which Opie was to make a full exposition in her publication *Illustrations of Lying* in 1825. Headstrong and acting against her mother’s instructions, Agatha elopes (cf. *Father and Daughter*) with the libertine and bigamist Danvers. The setting for the elopement is further reminiscent

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<sup>90</sup> F.P. Wilson, ed., *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p.632.

of Richardson's *Clarissa*: the 'wood near the park' in the symbolic darkness.<sup>91</sup>

For the modern reader, the central issue in Opie's novels and most of her other writing is of the strong-minded female and her survival in a censorious society which models females as passive representations of familial virtues and as subjects of paternal authority. Ty points out that this tension may not have been what Opie intended: she finds 'more compelling ... the resulting complexity as [Opie] works out the lesson about the need for control and temperance through the headstrong female.'<sup>92</sup> Here again we see the caution needed in imposing agendas from the present day. *Temper* may be seen as an expression of the collusion of social values. It predicates self-control, a learning by parental discipline and a sweet conformity rather than an angry rebellion: a fusion of conservative and Dissenting values indicative of the culture of the day, and modelled in such conduct books of the time as that of Jane West. The title *Temper* is seen as connoting trueness to purpose and resilience through – to develop Opie's metallurgical analogy – a tensile strength analogous to integrity and wisdom, virtues rated highly by Dissenters in both females and males, expressed in figurative language in keeping with the nascent industrialism of the early nineteenth century.

Danvers marries Agatha, but he takes care that there will be no evidence to prove this: both the clergyman and the only witness die

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<sup>91</sup> Richardson, p.502.

<sup>92</sup> Ty, p.163.

soon afterwards, and he has secreted the certificate. Agatha's subsequent difficulty in proving her marriage is reminiscent of that of Adeline Mowbray after her marriage to Berrendale. The marriage is not a success: with two self-centred people such as these, it is hardly likely to be so. Opie's lucid picture of the couple's life together seems to have been taken straight from Hogarth's 'Marriage à la Mode', plate II (1745). Once Danvers has spent most of Agatha's inheritance of £10,000 in settling his debts, there seems little inducement to maintain the illusion of a relationship. For Agatha to have a child and to discover her husband walking in St. James' Park in the company of other young ladies is only a matter of a few pages. Just as in *Father and Daughter* and *Adeline Mowbray*, Agatha is soon cast out and penniless with an infant in her arms, whom she names Emma, after her mother:

Agatha was married, yet had no husband; had a mother, yet was motherless; she was herself a parent without the means of prolonging the existence of her child; she was spotless in virtue, yet was believed criminal even by the mother who bore her in her bosom. (v.1, p.72)

Agatha is taken in by the Orwells, a tradesman and his wife, people forced by circumstance to live frugally, and this class-inversion of charity serves to emphasise the Orwell's integrity and Opie's emphasising virtue over high rank. Opie refers to them as 'Christians', and there is the strongest suggestion, through factors such as occupation, morality and modesty, that they are Dissenters. In return for their charity, Agatha toils to contribute to their income by the only means her privileged education has given her: painting watercolour

sketches of flowers, which the shopkeeper sells. Agatha is reconstructed as a woman of patience, modesty and diligence in the light of the examples set by her artisan-class benefactors and her own experiences of hardship and abuse by her husband. This is not the only tale by Opie which depicts the triumph of simple artisan values over the connivings of the wealthier classes: as well as the devoted servant in *Father and Daughter* and Savanna in *Adeline Mowbray*, there will be Lucy Merle in *Valentine's Eve* (1816). This is a crucial development and indicates how well Opie was aware of her changing audience: when members of the artisan class become agents of change central to the development of the character, and their frugal values shown in opposition to the indulgences of those with more money, then a moral hierarchy is set up which inverts the social hierarchy. Here are all the characteristics of robust Dissenting protestantism – thrift, industry, integrity, charity and a dealing with others that is mindful of a common humanity – but without the buttresses of middle-class affluence or formal education. These virtues may be contrasted with the narcissistic idleness of many of the wealthy figures portrayed in Opie's fiction. In an increasingly industrial and business-oriented society with its mind on reforms that will minimise land-ownership qualifications for enfranchisement and put an end to rotten boroughs, it appears that the wealthy are being portrayed as consumers of wealth rather than producers. Additionally, their morality is often suspect, of which the best examples in Opie's fiction of these middle years are Mrs. St. Aubin of *Temper*, who steals a five-pound note (v.2, p.192)

and Mrs Boughton of *Valentine's Eve*, who deliberately misrepresents her brother's wishes on an important matter. A new social order was being set up in Opie's fiction of this time just as it was in the real world: while the aristocracy was no longer in danger of being forcibly ousted from power in an English Jacobin revolution, another influential social grouping based on industry and trade was being depicted.<sup>93</sup>

Additionally, the rise in literacy, particularly among the urban artisan class, offered writers such as Opie new opportunities for portrayals of virtue.<sup>94</sup> The hermeneutic experience has more than a little narcissism: the reader wishes to see him or herself reflected in St. Réal's 'mirror travelling down a road', and Opie's sentimental tales for young female readers have already been discussed in this light. In this keen awareness of audience she is no different from other women writers of her time: consequently, her framing artisan figures in these positive terms suggests an awareness of a developing audience and a desire to include figures from that stratum of society.

It is inaccurate, however, to see Opie as a champion of the poor: in keeping with the conventions of her time, she has a tendency to romanticise them just as she romanticises Black slaves and Indian women. Just as with the ardent Jacobinism in her younger life, she is articulating in the Orwells an idealised *artisanatisme* based on their frugality, thrift and industry. This romanticising of the artisan class was to be very much a feature of the literature of the new century, as

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<sup>93</sup> see, e.g., Clark, p.62-63, p.67; Hobsbawm, p.32-3, p.40.

<sup>94</sup> Hunter, p.19.

the readership base expanded with the developments in literacy opportunities for this class. The novels of later writers, Gaskell and Dickens, for instance, often included depictions of artisan sturdiness and integrity – the Rouncewells from *Bleak House*, for example: artisan readers are thus given role models from their own class.<sup>95</sup>

As regards the form of the tale, the transgenerational change of characters is an innovation in Opie's fiction, in which hitherto one of the strengths has been the maintaining of a sharp focus on the protagonists in order that the consistency of the story as it unfolds is clear and unambiguous. The young Emma grows up in a way reminiscent of *Evelina*, of whom Edward Bloom, in his introduction to *Evelina*, writes, 'like any education, hers is cumulative, with virtue and self-awareness directed to social fulfilment. Being already endowed with virtue, she must now ensure its preservation.'<sup>96</sup>

Emma moves into a circle in which Opie is able to show certain stereotypes in interaction, in keeping with her didactic purpose: a study of temper, in the sense in which a metal is tempered to give it certain characteristics, the terminology of which, such as 'malleable', we find helpful in defining human characteristics. Each of these character-types is drawn with a broad brush: the egotistical Mr. Hargrave, who, Opie informs us, 'could never be an amiable man, an agreeable companion, or a beloved friend. He was the slave of a bold and incorrigible temper' (1, p.183). He contrasts with the young Henry

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<sup>95</sup> Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*, ed. by Nicola Bradbury (London: Penguin, 1996).

<sup>96</sup> Frances Burney, *Evelina*, ed. E Bloom (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.xix.



St. Aubyn, a man of some virtue and humility, but one of whom his author writes that ‘his most striking characteristic was filial piety’ – a man in love with his mother and bound by a deathbed promise made to his father to look after her (1, p.173). The other male is Egerton himself, a clergyman who has never recovered from the death of his first love who expired while he was waiting for an adequate living to come his way in order to marry her. Of the female characters, Miss Hargrave is the foremost, an incautious young woman whose ‘folly and flippancy had so far counteracted the power of her beauty’ in a way reminiscent of Louisa, the protagonist of *The Dangers of Coquetry* (1, p.197). These characters are arrayed for the young Emma to observe, so that their strengths and weaknesses may be instructive to her – and by extension, to the young reader.

Emma herself, raised by her mother and the Orwells in such exemplary conditions that value industry and truthfulness, cornerstones of Dissenting virtue, and yet invested with hereditary fineness, is perceived as a paragon. This bringing together of robust modern Dissenting virtue with a conservative emphasis on breeding is a combination of features that Opie uses frequently, perhaps enabling the young female middle-class reader to identify with her protagonist, although she will usefully separate these characteristics in *Valentine’s Eve*. Mrs. St. Aubyn describes Emma as having ‘No art – all pure nature there, and then so learned and so sensible, and yet she never gives herself airs,’ and later says that she has ‘all the modesty

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becoming her sex and age. She is ... like the six-hour primrose, that closes up its flowers in a bright and dazzling day, and only displays its beauties in the shade' (2, pp.137,139). The image constructed here is very similar to that which Opie constructed of the authoress Mrs Roberts, the writer of *Duty*, which work carries a commendatory foreword by Opie in which she describes Roberts's temper described as being

equal to any trial; and unimpaired, or rather, perfected by trials, it shone in the benign expression of her dark and animated eye, it dimpled her cheek with a smile the most endearing and benevolent, and spoke in the mild and tuneful accents of a voice which no-one ever heard without feeling disposed to love the being who possessed it.<sup>97</sup>

The similarities between these two women, one fictional and the other real, suggest just how structured the imaging of women as models of perfectibility had to be, and how closely the epitomes had to conform to the image of femininity of the time: sanguine, benevolent, made wise by trial and easily lovable. As Edward Bloom writes of Evelina in Burney's novel, the construction is of 'a representation of female decorum'.<sup>98</sup> Not only do Evelina and Emma function as individuated fictional characters and Mrs Roberts as a woman in real life, but each also represents a paradigm – that which Poovey has described as 'the perfect lady'.<sup>99</sup> The common factor in Opie's writing of Emma and Mrs Roberts is the minimising of either woman's education, which is asserted by the comment 'no art – all pure nature'

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<sup>97</sup> Roberts, p.12.

<sup>98</sup> Bloom, in Burney, p.xx.

in Emma's case, and the emphasis which both share on learning by experience: a sentimental education rather than a formal one.

Emma has become, in effect, the antithesis of the protagonist of Opie's first novel, *The Dangers of Coquetry*, written twenty-two years earlier. Also, she has become the antithesis of her mother, in a manner reminiscent of Inchbald's *Simple Story* (1791). By virtue of her experiences, she has acquired all the educated virtues of restraint and self-analysis that the self-centred and extroverted *ingenue* Louisa of *The Dangers of Coquetry* lacks. This trait is also present in *Valentine's Eve*, which Gary Kelly sees as a rewriting of *The Dangers of Coquetry*.<sup>100</sup> In place of Louisa's naïve self-centredness, we see in *Temper* Emma's self-questioning. 'I do not always speak well,' she says (v.2, p.162), and later shows her willingness to learn: 'I hope to profit ... by your lessons and by my own experience' (v.2, p.302). As a result of her mother's discipline, she does not lie. 'I considered lying to be so terrible an offence from the unusual severity in my indulgent mother, that I was terrified from committing it again' (v.2, p.252). Further, Emma is aware of the efforts of her mother on her behalf: 'I am well convinced that whatever of good there is in my temper or disposition, I owe to her judicious correcting in the early stages of my childhood' (v.3, p.116). Presenting a female protagonist with whom the young female reader can easily identify is not unusual in terms of didactic purpose, and a favourite technique not only of Opie but of

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<sup>99</sup> Poovey, p.27.

<sup>100</sup> Kelly, 1981, p.12.

many writers before and since. Victoria Coren, writing on Jane Austen, is not the only critic to observe that 'Romantic heroines are always exaggerated versions of their prospective audience'.<sup>101</sup>

Opie drives home the point of maternal responsibility shortly after, when she writes that 'on mothers chiefly depends the conduct which forms the temper of the child' (v.3, p.116). Ty takes this a stage further by remarking that 'Daughters atone for their mothers' errors', and usefully analyses the mother-daughter relationship in terms of the ambivalences in the relationships of mother, daughter and grand-daughter.<sup>102</sup> It is this responsibility which, despite the good intentions of men such as Torrington and Egerton in this novel and Dr. Norberry in *Adeline Mowbray*, women are expected to take to themselves. As in Opie's verse, men are frequently distant, often absent from the familial hearth, or preoccupied with their own vanities. The vulnerability of the woman as she attempts to negotiate the male-constructed world with a child in her arms is a recurring motif throughout Opie's tales, although only in *Adeline Mowbray* does she attempt to question why this motif persists – perhaps further indication of her intending that work for a more sophisticated audience.

Opie's other full-length tales and novels to this date have concluded tragically with the death of the protagonist, usually as the central figure of a morbid tableau and surrounded by friends. The themes are of forgiveness and gratitude for generosity, and the

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<sup>101</sup> Victoria Coren, 'In Search of Mr Right' *The Guardian*, April 20, 1999, p. G2/5.

<sup>102</sup> Ty, 1998, p.163.

wronged heroine dies a noble death. *Temper*, however, enjoys a comedic resolution in keeping with Opie's purpose of demonstrating that those who live according to her values, that is, are modest, truthful and receptive to instruction, will be rewarded. Emma comes to marry the man she loves, and Danvers, the seducer of her mother Agatha, finally admits their marriage before having the grace to expire. The final pages discourse on the topic of temper, so that the reader is left with no doubts about either the didactic nature of the tale or the message it imparts. The tale *Temper* tells is one of a conventional admixturing of fictional commonplaces, but this very banality was perhaps the secret of its success.

The reviewers' reaction to *Temper* was mixed. *The Critical Review* felt, quite reasonably, that it was the equal of neither *The Father and Daughter* nor *Adeline Mowbray*.<sup>103</sup> *The Monthly Review* found the tale less attractive, but 'more useful' than its predecessors.<sup>104</sup> Its utility was also the theme of *The Gentleman's Magazine*, which approved of Opie's depiction of 'the baneful effects of uncontrolled temper'.<sup>105</sup> As the reviewers were quick to perceive, the literary merits of Opie's work from this time forward were to be subordinated to her didactic objectives.

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<sup>103</sup> *The Critical Review*, 1 (1812), p.621.

<sup>104</sup> *The Monthly Review*, 68 (1812), p.326.

<sup>105</sup> *The Gentleman's Magazine*, 82, Part II (1812), p.464.

By 1814, Opie was starting to seek some further involvement with religion. She was spending increasing amounts of time when in Norwich with the Quaker Joseph John Gurney and visiting his sister, now Elizabeth Fry, at her home in Sussex. Quakers at that time deeply disapproved of music, art, theatre and fiction-writing, unless the fiction was a simple, didactic and thoroughly moral tale. Gurney had written to her on 4 June 1814 indicating his reservations about her immersion in what he termed the ‘fashionable world’, expressing the views

first, that there is much in it of *real evil*; the second that there is much also in it, which, though not evil in itself, yet has a decided tendency to produce forgetfulness of God, and thus to generate evil indirectly.<sup>106</sup>

A later letter dated 22 July 1814 made his ambitions for her perfectly clear: ‘My chief desire is that thou mayest be willing to give up everything which the light of Truth may point out as being inconsistent with the holy will of God.’<sup>107</sup> Gurney thus set up in Opie an awareness of the tension between the two main strands of her life: the provincial Quakerism of her Norwich circle and the glittering façades of her life in London. This tension was to become an increasing pre-occupation with her.

Opie’s letters to William Hayley reveal some of her awareness of Joseph John’s ambitions for her. On 25 July she wrote ‘I see he is not conscious of how much he wishes to make a Quaker of me.’<sup>108</sup> A

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<sup>106</sup> Braithwaite, p.236.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., p.237.

<sup>108</sup> Amelia Opie to William Hayley, 25 July 1814; Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

further letter to Hayley speaks of the two intermingled paths of her life at this time:

Strange, inconsistent being that I am! One day I am at a Countess' assembly, the other at a Quakers' meeting... now hearing sermons from public friends, now seeing plays – now walking along the streets on the arm of a plain Quaker, now leaning on the arm of a volatile Viscount.<sup>109</sup>

While staying with Hayley, she wrote to Gurney of the two pleasures she derived from worldliness, namely conversation and music, questioning 'how far my life may be considered as ... belonging to the gay world.'<sup>110</sup> The latter enjoyment in particular was one that many Quakers eschewed, and there was a long-running tension between Opie and the Norwich Quakers concerning her 'gay life': more than twenty years later, when Opie had been a convinced Friend for over a decade, Lucy Aggs, sister of J. J. Gurney and *doyenne* of the Norwich Friends, wrote to him with, it seems, a certain malice of encountering Opie's 'gay life in London'.<sup>111</sup> However, the letter of Opie to Gurney reminded him that she was becoming more sober in her choice of activities while in London, having passed over an engagement with the socialite Lady Cork to spend an evening with him and William Forster, a Quaker who lived in Tottenham.

The reconciliation of a radicalism which she still felt she possessed with her emerging interest in religious matters is discussed

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<sup>109</sup> Amelia Opie to William Hayley, 5 June 1815; Friends' Collection, Swarthmore, Pa.

<sup>110</sup> Amelia Opie to J. J. Gurney, 9 August 1815; Society of Friends, London.

<sup>111</sup> Lucy Aggs to J. J. Gurney, 27 August 1838; Society of Friends, London.

at length in a later letter to Hayley.<sup>112</sup> In this letter, she tries to reconcile republicanism with Christianity in a way which indicates considerable mental unease. In another letter to Gurney, Opie also records feeling a ‘degree of temper and republican pride’ when she subsequently encountered Lady Cork.<sup>113</sup> It is precisely these tensions – republicanism versus the *ancien régime*, sober intelligence versus the life of a courtesan – which receive full consideration in the tale on which she was working at the time, *Valentine’s Eve*.

However, a further tension entered her life: that of her love for Joseph John Gurney. Almost twenty years older than he, she must have known that it was unlikely that he would reciprocate. Nevertheless, this writer of emotional tales evidently found herself the victim of her own emotions. She wrote to Hayley on 6 March 1815 of ‘Joseph trying to woo a young lady’ – Jane Birkbeck of Kings Lynn.<sup>114</sup> Discouraged by this, she confided to Hayley that ‘I am far more admitted to the depths of [Gurney’s] heart than any one.’ A month later, as though powerlessly watching a nightmare unfold, she wrote to Hayley of her writer’s block with *Valentine’s Eve*, then adds what can only be seen as writing in denial: ‘Joseph is not likely to marry ... He is not in love with the young lady ... I am the only one for whom he

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<sup>112</sup> Amelia Opie to William Hayley, 5 November 1815; Fitzwilliam Museum.

<sup>113</sup> Amelia Opie to J. J. Gurney, 15 August 1815; Society of Friends, London.

<sup>114</sup> Amelia Opie to William Hayley, 8 February 1815; Fitzwilliam Museum.



feels any friendship and that fondness of which love is ultimately made.’<sup>115</sup>

A letter to Gurney six months later begins with an admission of the realisation of how dear he is to her and develops into a letter of intriguing ambiguity. The surface meaning is of Gurney’s engagement to Jane Birkbeck: she writes of the value of a good friend who one ‘may marry for esteem only, and in time love may come indeed’. She ‘feels encouraged to hope that the man of all my acquaintances whom I think most likely to make a good, nay, most excellent, husband, namely your own dear self, will ere long possess that domestic happiness which he so well deserves.’<sup>116</sup> The ambiguity rests in these words, for it seems clear that, given the conventions of the time and the coded deliveries which have been encountered in Opie’s other writing, they could apply equally well to herself as to Birkbeck. In this light, the letter is a startling declaration of her own love for Gurney.

This interpretation of a possibly coded message is strengthened by a letter to her confidant Hayley a few days later which speaks almost unintelligibly of illness, death and ‘much suffering’: unusually in her letters to him, her handwriting is almost indecipherable, probably indicative of considerable distress.<sup>117</sup> Hayley’s reply did not meet her needs: she rebuked him for his ‘few cold lines’.<sup>118</sup> Some six

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<sup>115</sup> Amelia Opie to William Hayley, 6 March 1815; Fitzwilliam Museum.

<sup>116</sup> Amelia Opie to J. J. Gurney, 31 December 1815; Society of Friends, London.

<sup>117</sup> Amelia Opie to William Hayley, 7 January 1816; Fitzwilliam Museum.

<sup>118</sup> Amelia Opie to William Hayley, 13 February 1816; Fitzwilliam Museum.

months later – an unusual lapse of time – she wrote to Gurney again, this time from London. The tone of this letter is one of negotiation both with him and with herself: ‘I could not shut up my heart towards you,’ she says, but ‘it never opens so widely as it once did’.<sup>119</sup> This and a subsequent letter written two days later express almost defiantly her immersion into the London season: ‘I am a complete worldling now’. She mentions a week ‘of extreme gaiety’ with her cousin Tom, a spendthrift solicitor with lodgings in Carey Street: ‘Tom has been my companion and I have been interested to see ye struggle between his love of dancing and his love of me...’<sup>120</sup> Correspondence as catharsis: considerable rearrangement of her affections had evidently taken place. Opie’s cultivation of other friends suggests her determination to put the matter to rest. Gurney married Jane Birkbeck in 1817. As far as can be ascertained, Opie would not write to Gurney again until 1822: ironically, she is offering her condolences on the death of Birkbeck.

*Valentine’s Eve*, published in 1816, appears to have been an attempt to write a tale of which her Quaker friends would approve, and yet retain her existing readership. While working on the tale, she had expressed a resolve to make ‘my heroine a pattern of Christian faith’.<sup>121</sup> Brightwell reinforces this view in the overtly religious and didactic motives she ascribes to the tale, thus emphasising her aunt’s

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<sup>119</sup> Amelia Opie to J. J. Gurney, 15 June 1816; Society of Friends, London.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Amelia Opie to William Hayley, 18 November 1814; Fitzwilliam Museum.

moral integrity: ‘The lesson it inculcates is the superiority of religious principle as a rule of action and as a support under affliction and unmerited calumny.’<sup>122</sup> Nevertheless, Opie informs Hayley of how her publisher had warned her of the necessary emphasis she must place on strong emotion: ‘Indeed, madam, you must be horrid pathetic,’ Longman had told her.<sup>123</sup> A three-volume novel published by Longman in 1816, it sold almost two thousand copies but was finally remaindered in 1833.<sup>124</sup>

The tale presents many of the well-used fictional devices that her readers had come to expect in Opie’s fiction: the beau-monde setting; the tensions of credibility – in this case, of family connection between the protagonist Catherine and her grandfather, General Shirley, who becomes her patron; the exposition of values of conservative moral virtue; the libertine and the low-ranking evil-doer who repents, set against loosely-sketched backgrounds of Vauxhall Gardens, fireworks and fashionable salons.

Gary Kelly sees the tale as ‘a revision of the themes and characters of her first fiction, *The Dangers of Coquetry*’, although he does not elaborate on this observation.<sup>125</sup> Similarly, there is no evidence from letters or other writing of Opie’s that indicates that she wished *Valentine’s Eve* to be seen in this way. However, just as *The*

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<sup>122</sup> Brightwell, p.179.

<sup>123</sup> Amelia Opie to William Hayley, 27 November 1815; Fitzwilliam Museum.

<sup>124</sup> See Appendix A: Amelia Opie’s Earnings from Longmans, p. 339.

<sup>125</sup> Kelly, 1981, p.12.

*Dangers of Coquetry* showed a young woman being ushered into society and losing her reputation by giving in to temptations – to attend a party when her husband was away, to gamble, to respond to a libertine’s suggestions – so Catherine, the protagonist of this tale, is able to successfully negotiate the social maze up to a point, when, although she is innocent of any wrongdoing, her reputation is soiled by a libertine. This results in her husband Lord Shirley, rather than being too gentle and circumspect as is Mortimer in *The Dangers of Coquetry*, fearing the worst and estranging himself from her. Again, there are connections between both tales and Frances Burney’s *Evelina* (1778). Spencer describes *Evelina*, discovered walking with two prostitutes, as ‘an unconscious coquette’, and Louisa of *The Dangers of Coquetry* may be said to fit that description also.<sup>126</sup> Conversely, in *Valentine’s Eve*, Catherine is painfully aware of the way in which her reputation has been compromised.

Of particular interest is the use Opie makes of Lucy Merle, the foil to Catherine, and the role she plays in the narrative. Opie appears to use this character as a vehicle for many of her frustrated radical hopes and opinions in the aggressively Conservative post-Revolutionary period. Opie’s stifled political awarenesses are glimpsed in elliptical references in her letters and in other contemporaries’ comments about her. A letter to Robert Garnham of 1801, talks of ‘times as gloomy as the present’ and ‘the approaching

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<sup>126</sup> Spencer, p.153.

storm'.<sup>127</sup> In 1814 Crabb Robinson recalled that she, like Mrs Barbauld and Helen-Maria Williams, talked 'freely on political subjects to us without restraint.'<sup>128</sup> The fact that Crabb Robinson makes a special point of grouping these three women together suggests how unusual it was for women of that time to talk politics. Conversely, many letters written by Opie are relatively free of the topic, even those to William Hayley, perhaps indicating her awareness of the impropriety of political expression when in a more permanent form.<sup>129</sup>

Opie has employed foils before in order to set off socially-acceptable behaviour against the impulsive actions of her protagonist, notably in *Father and Daughter*. In *Valentine's Eve*, however, the difference is of class or rank, and Opie uses the character of Lucy to construct a rationale for a retention of certain revolutionary principles which might serve to assuage not only her own conscience but also that of her readers. Such a construction portrays the shift in values away from the old polarisations of the 1790s to one in which Dissenters took a more centrist role in politics and society. Having opened the tale at the moment when news of Nelson's victory at Trafalgar (1805) reached London, Opie then tells us that Lucy's father was

one of the many republicans, or democrats, some twenty years ago, who profligacy and poverty led to rally round that respectable standard, which was originally erected from the

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<sup>127</sup> Amelia Opie to Robert Garnham, 1801; Crabb Robinson Collection, Dr Williams's Library, London.

<sup>128</sup> H. Crabb Robinson, p.147.

<sup>129</sup> See Appendix C: Letters, esp. those letters relating to 1814.

purest and most disinterested love of civil and religious liberty.<sup>130</sup>

Lucy herself, 'led by her father's conviction and that of the politicians assembled at his house, [imbibed] the purest form of liberty and the purest love of Republicanism'(p.55). This upbringing manifests itself in her fearless speaking-out, particularly to those who deemed themselves superior by rank, but whose discourse might be corrupt, as when she explains her departure from the company of the wealthy Mrs Sawston and Viscountess Lady X, who are discussing a love affair:

I dare not stay; you are so beautiful and so fascinating that I dare not expose myself to the danger of having my principles corrupted by listening to the praises of adultery from a being so calculated to make the *wrong* appear the *better* course.  
(p.276)

This articulation of the ethical superiority of uncompromising morality over the more slippery values of the aristocracy reflects the values not only of the revolutionaries *manqué*, fictionalized by Lucy's father, but of the middle-class Dissenting readership. Having excused republicans and democrats from social obloquy by pointing to their pure motives, Opie then excuses those who have since discarded radical values by saying of Lucy that 'as she grew older ... she grew more moderate in her feelings, more enlarged in her ideas, and more reserved in disclosing them' (p.56). Lucy thus represents an idealised model of contemporary womanhood, a 'tall, dignified and beautiful girl ... with republican pride ... and the consciousness of more than

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<sup>130</sup> Amelia Opie, *Valentine's Eve* (London: Longman, 1816), p.54. Subsequent quotations are from this edition, and page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

her sex's usual intellect and eloquence' (p.57). This depiction is especially significant given the year of publication of the work, because, in an age when radicalism could be mistaken for sympathy with France, it foregrounds the reformist values of intellect, morality and plain speaking by referring back to republican mores but then pointing out an enlargement of view and a maturation of values. Opie's technique of creating characters with which the reader can readily identify has developed in that in *Lucy* she is creating a character who does not aspire to gentility, as does the protagonist Catherine and the succession of beautiful heroines in her earlier works, but one who has the integrity of the new middle class, sure of itself in the manner Corfield describes, and with moral values presented as superior to the aristocracy, who are referred to as having 'flinty hearts' (p.68).

Catherine, the high-born but initially downcast protagonist, is another in the line of Opie heroines: young, beautiful and inclined to worthy acts. Less interesting than her foil Lucy, in terms of narrative focus she is clearly the principal, who, as MacGregor says, was to be seen as 'an ideal of Christian womanhood'.<sup>131</sup> In constructing characters so equally worthy, one by birth and piety, the other by intelligence, and by depicting the class differences as equally worthy, Opie is extending the ways in which her readership may identify with the central figures of the tale. It is no longer necessary for the reader to accept the aspiration to gentility and its values in order to identify with a central figure. This lack of aspiration makes Lucy much less prone to

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<sup>131</sup> MacGregor, p.65.

indulge in the kind of courtship intrigues and risky manoeuvres in which a young woman such as Catherine has to participate so that she may be seen as a viable commodity.

Lucy serves as a vehicle by which to advance the dissenter's cause of female education, since her behaviours and attitudes contrast very favourably with those of the old dowagers. When one of them, Mrs. Boughton, derides her in condescending tones for having the nerve to advance an opinion which the reader can see is a worthy one, Opie is attempting to arouse the reader's dislike of privileged reaction:

‘*Your* opinion, indeed!’ replied Mrs. Boughton with a sneer, ‘*your* opinion! And pray, child, what right have you to *have* any opinion?’ (p.260, author's italics)

Mrs Boughton is in the role of the disagreeable *senex* in the tale. Malignant towards Lucy and suspicious of Catherine's birth, she is an inversion of the pantomime dame, who is generally a benign figure and played by a man in women's costume, but equally risible: Mrs. Boughton may be seen as a woman dressed in all the worst characteristics of a male hegemony, not dissimilar to Mme. Duval, Evelina's grandmother in Fanny Burney's novel.<sup>132</sup> Mrs. Boughton represents an *ancien régime* of duplicity, vested interest, adultery, ignorance and arrogance which contrasts nicely with Lucy's assertive intelligence and high morality to show a modern young middle-class woman in a positive light.

Lucy's ability to express herself is in marked contrast with that of Catherine and her lover and husband, Lord Shirley, nephew of the

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General. Their relationship is constrained by the polite forms of address which they habitually use to each other and, more importantly, the silences which occur whenever either of them is repressed by their gentrified upbringing. Their interactions are prescribed by rigid and repressive convention, and the effect of this is to create confusion, uncertainty and eventually deepest suspicion. This breakdown in dialogue is made clearly evident in the depiction of Lord Shirley with such lines as: 'But why was Catherine so pale, and why was Lucy Merle distressed, thought Lord Shirley ... he had no right to demand an explanation'(p.348). The demanding of an explanation is a manifestation of the male hegemony, with its denotations of imperious will in the verb. Other approaches might be more appropriate: offering sympathy, for example, which might lead to a spontaneous explanation, but Shirley, a victim of the repressive nature of the social conventions he represents, does not do this, and yet feels unable to do anything else except fret. He feels obliged to respect the sense of duty that he attributes to his wife, which makes it impossible for him to broach the subject that is destroying his emotional balance and poisoning his relationship with her: 'He well knew that, whatever she felt, this was a subject which her strong sense of a wife's duty would forbid her to talk upon' (3, p.44). His inability to talk to his wife leads to assumptions and his vulnerability to gossip. When Opie has him express his worst fear about Catherine, it is worded as an assertion, not open to question: '... fallen as she is' is his comment to himself (p.45).

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<sup>132</sup> Fanny Burney, *Evelina* (London: T. Lowndes, 1778).

When his uncle, the General, attempts to discover why Shirley is so upset and why he has banished his wife from his house, well-bred reserve disintegrates into unmanly but equally uninformative tears: “For mercy’s sake, Lionel, tell me what has happened to you.” Lord Shirley wrung the hand he offered in silence, and burst into tears’ (ibid.).

Just as with her study of Agnes’s agoraphobia and her father’s madness in *Father and Daughter*, Opie’s awareness of human behaviour is very sound. Shirley is revealing a lack of ability in what Jonathan Rutherford describes as the ‘language of affect, the putting into words of instinctual life’, and a reading of Opie’s novel makes it clear that it is his upbringing as a member of the ruling class which has made him so.<sup>133</sup> The contrast with Lucy’s fearless eloquence is well made, and the reader is left with an awareness of the shortcomings of those figures claiming privileged positions in the social hegemony. The gender implications as well as the advancement of dissenting (and therefore middle-class) capabilities cannot be ignored: Lucy indeed poses a threat to the non-analytical complacency of the ruling class, with its assumption that the women in it – such as Mrs. Sawston, Viscountess X and Mrs Boughton, will also participate in its exercise of hegemony, and its consequent inability to articulate the affective domain. In this respect, in contrast with Lucy, the women who see themselves as part of this hegemony are obliged to construct their discourse in a similar way, so as to be seen as not wishing to subvert it.

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What we know of Shirley's upbringing may be gathered from the epitaphs on his parents' graves. That for his mother reinforced the subordinate, supportive and ultimately decorative role of the woman: 'A virtuous woman is a crown to her husband'. That for his father implies military glory which also suggests absence, neglect of his child and suppression of affect: the line from Horace, '*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*' (v.1, p.247).<sup>134</sup> 'The failure to achieve this [language of affect]', continues Rutherford, 'marks a silence, a gap or absence within an individual subjectivity', and it is exactly this we see passed down to the son (ibid.).

It is this silence which engenders the misunderstandings around which the plot revolves, and here Opie has no hesitation in making overt references to Shakespeare's *Othello*. The similarities are evident: the growing suspicion, based on silence and compounded by rumour, the dutiful, moral, naïve young woman, victimised by a man's inability to confront his wife until he has what he accepts as proof.

The climactic scenes of *Valentine's Eve* closely follow the resolution of the plot, in which the mysterious stranger is identified and the suspicions harboured by Shirley regarding Catherine's fidelity are overcome. In this sense, the outcome is comedic rather than tragic by Shakespearean convention. Nevertheless, the sentimental conventions have to be honoured by depicting the death of the protagonist. In the final scene, a typical Opie tableau, she dies happy that her reputation is

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<sup>133</sup> Jonathan Rutherford, *Men's Silences* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.x.

<sup>134</sup> Horace, *The Complete Odes and Epodes*, trans. & ed. by David West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 4 vols., 2, 13.

once more secure, that her husband is reconciled to her, and forgiving him his suspicions. Also present are General Shirley, her grandfather and patron, and Lucy Merle: the reader cannot but reflect that the reason why Lucy is in good health is because she has consistently refused to be drawn into the gender negotiations of the *beau monde*.

In running the two characters of Catherine and Lucy together throughout the tale, Opie appears to be asserting the superiority of a morally-driven middle-class life, in which the woman can so much more be her own mistress because she is not willing to become perceived as commodity, over that of the upper ranks, in which a woman is perceived as, and trained to see herself as, eligible. We must not carry the commodity analogy too far, for both Lucy and Catherine have minds of their own: just that Catherine, from an aristocratic family, follows the path laid out for her by her birth, whereas Lucy, born into a lesser rank, is not under such an obligation. After the turgidity of *Temper*, the didactic value of *Valentine's Eve* is thus much less overt, and Opie is again attempting not unsuccessfully to articulate ideas of class and female identity in a writerly way.

At the time *Valentine's Eve* was being written, Opie herself was exploring the autonomy possible for a vigorous widow of comfortable means and some fame in her mid-forties. During the period of conceptualising and beginning to write, as we have seen, she was becoming increasingly involved with the Norwich Quakers, although by the time the tale was ready for publication she had, for the

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time being, severed that connection following her disappointment with J. J. Gurney. In *Valentine's Eve*, therefore, she questions the values of the glamorous cosmopolitan life of the wealthy and constructs her most interesting character in the tale, Lucy Merle, as a thoroughly modern woman: educated, middle-class and confident.

William Hayley admired the work and wrote to her in verse:

Thy Catherine follows thee – how just her Claim  
To share, and to encrease, Amelia's Fame! ...  
Thou, in whose Books and Life we doubly find  
Such Heaven-taught Morals as exalt the Mind!  
Be Thou in Trials that the Heart perplex,  
The Guardian-Genius of thy lovely Sex!<sup>135</sup>

Opie may have expected her spiritual advisor Gurney to have been equally appreciative: indeed, on receiving the first volume,

Joseph paid her the compliment of laying aside a learned book on religion to spend the day in perusing her work. ... To Convinced Friends the reading of a novel was a frivolity amounting to worldliness; Joseph, though his conscience was uneasy, was absorbed in the tale.<sup>136</sup>

However, his absorption turned to abhorrence by the time he encountered volume three. Opie gives an account of a painful interview between her and Gurney in a letter to Hayley dated 3 May 1816, which must have been especially difficult given the situation between the two of them at that time.<sup>137</sup> The letter describes 'the pain my late new work had given some of my best and most respectable friends from its *impurity*' and that she 'had alluded to adultery,

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<sup>135</sup> MacGregor, p.64.

<sup>136</sup> Jacobine Menzies-Wilson & Helen Lloyd, *Amelia: the Tale of a Plain Friend* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937), p.163.

<sup>137</sup> Amelia Opie to William Hayley, 3 May 1816; Fitzwilliam Museum.

seduction &c & a house of ill-fame, things not to be named , especially by a woman ....' Joseph's brother Hudson Gurney, a person 'of the world, and not [a] serious character' (i.e. not religious) opined that Opie had 'injured [her] own consideration in Society by writing such things, & that [she] was making the minds of young women impure by communications on such subjects.' Whether the capital 'S' on society should indicate the Society of Friends or simply society in general is not clear: if the former, it particularly indicates Opie's confused state of mind at that time.

Brightwell does not allude to the poor reception *Valentine's Eve* received from the person Opie most wished to impress, nor to the interview which followed, since this would undo her construction of Opie as a figure of rectitude. She also fails to mention the unfavourable comments of the reviewers. The *Monthly Review* stated that 'This story is not calculated either by its conduct or by its circumstances to display advantageously the talents of the writer.'<sup>138</sup>

The *British Lady's Magazine* was equally unimpressed, stating that

*Valentine's Eve* is every way unworthy of Mrs Opie ... we have been woefully disappointed ... she has attempted something more [than her usual productions] and failed. Her heroine, too, is in very bad taste; for we are not to be misled by the religious garb ... into admiration of folly and inconsistency.<sup>139</sup>

It is tempting to read both Gurney's displeasure and the critics' negative comments as a tribute to Opie's efficacy in articulating an ideology which was too close to the truth to be acceptable in a society

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<sup>138</sup> *Monthly Review*, Enlarged Series, 79 (1816), pp.438-439.

<sup>139</sup> *British Lady's Magazine*, 4 (1816), p.180.

which depended so much on the exercise of a double-standard of the topical issues of sex, class and gender. By comparison with her other works of this middle period, *Valentine's Eve* shows a critical gaze. It displays reconciliations of political and social differences in her treatment of Lucy Merle alongside divisions and questionable integrity in the presentation of the ruling class. The indication is of a complex ideology at work: one that cannot be classified as either conservative or radical. This positive view of the work appears to correspond with Gary Kelly's concept of an 'unofficial ideology' at work – a concept which he applies to the writings of the 1790s, but which can apply equally well to the work of a writer whose formative years were during that time and who has manifested this unofficial ideology in her earlier works.<sup>140</sup> One can see his criteria of 'the riven family, broken by ... excessive conformity to social convention' in this tale, and the workings of 'a dominant and hegemonic patriarchal attitude to the relation between self and society, and a submerged and therefore covert feminist one.' The political and social polarities of the 1790s had, by 1816, given way to a more complex set of ideological positions. Neo-conservatism, with its strong distaste for Jacobinism, had found its own validation in the defeat of the Revolutionary Armies of France in 1815. However, radical and reformist ideas found expression in other spheres such as those Opie dealt with at this time: anti-slavery and the education of girls, for example, so the need for an unofficial ideology in the texts of the day was still there.

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*Tales of the Heart* (1820) included 'Love, Mystery and Superstition', a tale of sufficient unusualness to warrant special scrutiny.<sup>141</sup> In this tale, Opie again employs the conceit of non-authorship, claiming only to have edited the tale for a man who had found it 'among the same hoard of family manuscripts' (v.1, p.2). Immediately the reader is confronted with the sectarian divide: the narrator records how she 'did not like to injure the unity of a Catholic story by the comments of a Protestant editor' (ibid.). The tale is set in 1683, the year the Rye House plot to assassinate Charles II was discovered, and one year after 58,000 French Huguenots were forced to conversion as several thousand others fled, many to England.

The relationship between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism in England at the time assists in evaluating Opie's tale. England was a Protestant country which eyed what Carson terms 'continental despotism' with a mixture of xenophobic horror and a sense of superiority.<sup>142</sup> The sense of cultural isolation from Europe was very real. As Robert Southey comments, 'the constitution of the country was, by the collected voice of the people, declared to be essentially and exclusively Protestant.'<sup>143</sup> Roman Catholics were

<sup>140</sup> Kelly, 1981, pp.3-24.

<sup>141</sup> Amelia Opie, *Tales of the Heart*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, 1820), 1, pp. 1-276. Subsequent quotations are from this edition, and page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

<sup>142</sup> J. P. Carson, 'Enlightenment, Popular Culture and Gothic Fiction' in Richetti, ed., p.261.

<sup>143</sup> Robert Southey, *The Book of the Church* (London, 1824), 2 vols., 2, p.257.



regarded with suspicion in this country where Church and State were closely intertwined. J C D Clark, while not endorsing the view himself, explains why this was so.

A society bound by Christian oaths could not, Anglicans maintained, accept those – whether atheists or papists – who could not give guarantees of their behaviour; and the Roman doctrine of ‘exclusive salvation’ could be expected to make Catholics unreliable fellow citizens [in] a Protestant society.<sup>144</sup>

There had been the anti-Catholic Gordon Riots of 1780, and the war with France and the French Empire, not to mention the Irish Revolution of 1798, had only reinforced the sense of mistrust. Clark mentions Lord Eldon’s comments in the parliamentary debate on what had become known as the ‘Catholic question’ in 1819, which emphasises the suspicion with which Catholics were regarded: ‘Roman Catholics had systematically pursued the accomplishment of their own objects and the destruction of our national Church.’<sup>145</sup> A Roman Catholic historian, however, presents a different perspective: she writes that Catholicism in England was ‘rendered totally impotent by persecution, penal restrictions and a government policy intended to liquidate it.’<sup>146</sup> Emancipation, attempted repeatedly over this period, was not achieved until 1829.

For most of the population of England, therefore, Roman Catholicism was charged with a distinct otherness arising from these three roots: foreignness in a time of national isolation; superstition in a

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<sup>144</sup> Clark, p.355.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., p.384.

<sup>146</sup> Joan Connell, *The Roman Catholic Church in England, 1780-1850* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1984), p.3.

time of rationality; potential treachery in a time of social conformity. Opie's tale explores all three of these othernesses in a darkly Gothic narrative which titillates the sensibilities, largely through her successful use of the young, blonde English protestant Lady Barbara, who mediates between the reader and the darkness of the tale.

Michel Foucault writes of this titillation when he discusses the anti-Augustan qualities of the Gothic,

especially the fear of darkened spaces, of the pall of gloom which prevents the full visibility of things, men and truth. ... Now these imaginary spaces are the negative of the transparency and visibility which [non-Gothic writers] aimed to establish.<sup>147</sup>

The sense of an obfuscating darkness is evident enough.

Paradoxically, this very gloom, however, could reveal and even liberate: the paradox turns on the interface between the outer world of society and the inner world of the emotions. Eve Sedgwick, discussing aspects of de Quincey and Charlotte Bronte, writes that the function of the Gothic is 'to open horizons beyond social patterns, rational decisions, [to be] a great liberator of feeling.'<sup>148</sup> Sedgwick goes on to identify several characteristics which comprise the Gothic tale, and it is as though Opie had read this list before putting pen to paper. Those of Sedgwick's characteristics found in Opie's tale, in order in which they occur, are: a deathlike state, use of exotic names, subterranean darkness, being buried alive, echoes and silences, a tale

<sup>147</sup> Michel Foucault, 'The Eye of Power' in C Gordon, ed., *Power/Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), p.153.

<sup>148</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Convention* (London: Methuen, 1980), p.4.

within a tale, holy orders, paranoia, wanderings and feelings of guilt and shame.

In Opie's tale, Lady Barbara, a member of the English nobility and aged fifteen at the beginning of the tale, is fascinated by a beautiful and exotic woman in dire circumstances who is brought to the house in the darkness of night. This is the telling of a resurrection, for the manservant, O'Carroll, calls: 'For the love of the Holy Virgin, I conjure you to let me in, for I have a dead woman in my arms, whom I want to bring to life' (p.5). The religious invocation, the manservant's name and his terrible message are powerful *mise-en-scène* devices and compare with the introduction of Frankenstein in Mary Shelley's tale of that name, published two years earlier, in which the narrator, Walton, another Protestant intermediary figure like Lady Barbara, tells of meeting 'a man on the brink of destruction ... His limbs were nearly frozen, and his body dreadfully emaciated by fatigue and suffering.'<sup>149</sup>

The mysterious woman recovers in the warmth of the house. Her physical description evokes a sense of frailty in contrast to the robust Lady Barbara which emphasises her otherness:

pale and thin, almost to emaciation: her eyes were dark and shaded with still-darker eye-lashes, while her black and glossy hair, parted a la madonna on the forehead, was twisted round her small and graceful head. (p.24)

The otherness is further developed in the names the woman gives as she identifies herself, strange names which seem exotic in the

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<sup>149</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, ed. by M. Hindle (London: Penguin, 1992), p.24.

bracing air of northern England, causing Barbara to exclaim: 'What pretty names – Rosalie, Madeleine, Rinaldo!'

Some time later, Barbara's brother Tyrconnel finds himself 'at eight o'clock of a November night, travelling in mountainous country without a guide or companion', a Gothic situation in itself (p.71). He encounters 'an extensive building ... which appeared to be a ruin', and, seeking shelter, finds that it is the home of these three strangers. He encounters Madeleine, whom he describes:

Her dress was of black silk, her veil black also ... the marked eye-brow and the long eye-lashes formed the strongest possible contrast to the transparent skin beneath them. That clear, pale cheek told a tale of approaching dissolution, and the rapid heaving of the dress which was folded over her bosom declared that her fluttering heart had nearly beaten its last. (p.91)

The description of Madeleine contrasts with that of Lady Barbara, grown to adulthood and marriage and depicted as a 'happy being', a 'kind girl' whose husband and dog were 'still her two prime passions, but she has, I own, added to them two or three others: two lovely children, working chairs in tent-stitch for her drawing-room and making up baby-linen' (p.112). This image of productive, fulfilled womanhood, subtly matronised in the term 'girl', emphasises the otherness of Madeleine, beautiful but sickly, enervated and preoccupied. Here the light and the dark, the healthy and the dissolute are juxtaposed to great effect. The deathlike state is plain. Opie develops her theme as Tyrconnel is led by Dupont into 'a large Gothic hall where a few faintly-burning faggots lay expiring on the capacious hearth' and the connection between the fire and the inhabitants is very clear (p.74). The feeling is subterranean, of being buried alive and the

echoes and silences create an unsettling atmosphere of concealment. Almost by accident he meets the lovely Rosalie and falls in love with her, establishing the connection of darkness with emotions.

That night, he is awakened by 'deep groans, as of one in agony' and cries of 'O mercy, mercy, thou offended God' (pp.83-84). He discovers Dupont evidently flagellating himself, but Tyrconnel's enquiry is met with polite secrecy.

Jane Spencer remarks that the castle in the Gothic romance is 'the trap of womanhood', and this is evident here: Rosalie is effectively incarcerated and the dreadful sight of the tubercular Madeleine seems to be a harbinger of her own fate.<sup>150</sup> Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) exercised a similar theme, as did the earlier *The Castle of Otranto* by Horatio Walpole (1765). In Opie's tale, however, there is no breathtaking flight through dark subterranean passages as with Manfred and Isabella. The flight is contained in the tale within a tale, told by Dupont on his deathbed and after the death of Madeleine.

Dupont's tale is of passion and guilt. He reveals himself as 'Rinaldo, Count Manfredi di Guastella' and how as a youth he loved Rosamunda. Both took holy orders hoping to divert their passion to the adoration of the Christ. Even this step was a cause for Rinaldo's guilt, since 'my first degrees in sanctity were taken by a violation of the duty of obedience to my father' (p.219). Rinaldo elopes with Rosamunda, who, on taking her vows took the name Sister

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<sup>150</sup> Spencer, p.152.

Angela. In Protestant Switzerland she takes the name Madeleine. They flee to Calvinist Scotland where they are married as Protestants and Rosalie is born, but find no haven there. Rinaldo – Dupont – vows never to caress his daughter, so that she will not come to see him as her father and her parentage will thus never be suspected. Their paranoia takes the form of fear of the Church's avengers. As their friend Monroe warns them, 'Have they not to *punish* sinners if they cannot reclaim them?' (p.249). Their wanderings take them to England, where they live under the shadow of the poisonous effects of guilt and shame in an alien country which exists in spiritual darkness.

The climax of the tale is the dying man's plea: 'Rosalie is pious; Rosalie is pure. But then I own that she is the child of parents who committed great sin before they could be the authors of her being' (p.260). 'The truth was that to us [Rinaldo and Rosamunda/ Madeleine] the GREATEST OF ALL TRIALS was the idea of SEPARATION' (p.263, Opie's capitalisation). 'Give my daughter [Rosalie] to your son [Tyrconnel] and let me go on my way rejoicing.' The bargain is quickly agreed to, and the sense of fulfillment of destiny is similar to the final utterance of Frankenstein, who tells Walton 'I thank you for your sympathy, but it is useless; my fate is nearly fulfilled. I want but for one event and then I shall repose in peace.'<sup>151</sup>

'Gothic fiction' writes Elizabeth MacAndrew 'gives shape to concepts of the place of evil in the human mind,' and later 'good and

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<sup>151</sup> Shelley, p.292.

evil [in Gothic romances] are starkly differentiated absolutes.’<sup>152</sup> This is the case in Opie’s tale: the force of good is seen as the human spirit with its capacity for love and its passion, whereas the powers of evil are seen in the hierarchies, rituals and superstitions of the Roman Catholic church, with the senses of guilt and fear that it engenders. This moral framework is presented via the mediation of the English interlocutors, particularly Lady Barbara and Tyrconnel, who, being aristocrats, we may take to be Anglicans. They display right actions – hospitality, concern, domesticity and valour – towards their Italian friends. The message of the story, therefore, is that it is the institution of the Roman Catholic church which is to be despised rather than individuals caught up in Catholicism who are struggling to exist within that system. The implication of the final action, the giving of Rosalie to Tyrconnel, is that Rosalie will adopt the Anglican faith on her marriage to him. This presents the possibility of salvation, in keeping with the tenets of the Anglican Church.

Opie’s tale therefore fits the conventional views held in English society at the time regarding Catholicism, presented as an otherness throughout her tale. Her own views on Catholicism seem emphatic that it is an otherness and they are made plain in a letter to Robert Southey written some fifteen years later. Discussing the need for hospital reform, she notes the efforts of the Sisters of Mercy in France, seeing their good work as an incitement to begin something in England before the Catholic Church takes the initiative, which would only contribute

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<sup>152</sup> Elizabeth MacAndrew, *The Gothic Tradition in Fiction* (New York: Columbia

to ‘the spread of their pestilent superstition’.<sup>153</sup> The almost prurient thrill of this investigation of such other lives as those of the Italian Catholics in the tale, through the mediation of the familiar English characters, would serve to increase the reader’s hostility to the Catholic Church by virtue of the depiction of the dark Gothic elements Opie uses in describing it.

Opie was to become a committed Quaker in 1825, but the publication of her next work, *Madeline*, in 1822 already demonstrates some of the reconciliations she was experiencing, and served to earn Joseph John Gurney’s approbation – an important consideration in view of the difficulties he had experienced in reading *Valentine’s Eve* and the reliance Opie placed on him regarding her admission, in due course, to the Society of Friends. The fact that his first wife, Jane Birkbeck, died in June 1822 after a long illness, also seems to have stimulated Opie’s wish to please Gurney. Whether the remodelling of an etching of her by Mrs. Mary Turner, taken from John Opie’s portrait of her of 1798, was a further sign of wishing to please him is unclear. However, her letter to Dawson Turner thanking Mrs Turner for the etching expresses pleasure that she ‘cut her off at the shoulders’, fearing that the dress in Opie’s portrait was too ‘slovenly and bedgownish according to the mode of the day’.<sup>154</sup> The new etching

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University Press, 1979), pp. 2 & 4.

<sup>153</sup> Amelia Opie to Robert Southey, 13 January 1830; Wordsworth Collection, Grasmere, Stanger 2/100.5. See also Southey to Opie of 30 August 1829; Brotherton Collection, Leeds University. See Appendix: Letters.

<sup>154</sup> Amelia Opie to Dawson Turner, 4 March 1822 and 7 March 1822; Trinity College, Cambridge, Dawson Turner Collection.



reflected the current conservative mode of dress, as well as having the hair rearranged in a more restrained style.

The cost of pleasing the unworldly Gurney was the production of a very dull book indeed. The narrative, published in two volumes, begins with another conceit of non-authorship. This disingenuous claim is developed in the first paragraphs, which advise the reader that here is ‘an opportunity of reading the SECRET DETAILS of the faults, the cares, the sorrows, the hopes, the sentiments, the actions and the adventures’ of the protagonists of her tale (v.1, p.2).<sup>155</sup> Prurient interest thus excited, the reader finds a narrative in the form of a young woman’s journal. Unfortunately, the style is so stagnant and lacking in tension, the plot so indiscernable and the characters so commonplace that the initial excitement soon evaporates. By the end of the first volume, we are aware that Madeline, the eponymous heroine whose private journals are exposed to our gaze, is expected to marry Maclean, whereas her heart inclines to Glencarron. This regrettable state of affairs is compounded when they secretly promise themselves to each other in a form of marriage, but are unable to ‘declare’ the marriage openly (vol.2, p.86). The letters which pass to and fro between the couple, in the style of eighteenth-century writers such as Richardson, are curiously bland. Opie, known (and presumably read) for her depictions of emotionality, is unsuccessfully attempting to reconcile a Quakerist quietism with a traditional romantic conflict. The plot

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<sup>155</sup> Amelia Opie, *Madeline* (London: Longman, 1822), 3 vols., 1 p.2. Subsequent quotations are from this edition, and page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

becomes another interrogation of *Adeline Mowbray*: the secret marriage is the opposite of the open non-marriage, except that given the manoeuvring necessary to guard the secret, it seems infinitely more trouble.

The epistolary style is interrupted for an omniscient narrator to inform the reader of an accident befalling Glencarron. Madeline, thinking that he is dying, resolves to throw caution to the wind and go to him. She leaves a note for her parents, which is not seen. All the ingredients are assembled for some lively prose, but Opie lets us down. She relies on a narration in which the action is reported from (as it were) offstage, and she deals unsuccessfully with problems of the narrative voice. As a result, there is no tension to drive the plot forward. We know from her earlier works and her sense of the dramatic that Opie is capable of writing at a sustained level of tension – *Father and Daughter*, for example, or the more recent *Valentine's Eve*. In these tales, as in *Adeline Mowbray*, her main strength has been her naturalistic dialogue, a device she is not able to employ to great effect in a journalistic narrative, since speech must be reported rather than *viva voce*.

Madeline and Glencarron flee to France, only returning to England for Madeline to give birth. After the arrival of the child, Glencarron begins to ignore her. At first he claims that he 'forced himself to stay away' to 'teach [Madeline] a lesson for the future' (v.2, p.193). However, his head is soon turned by the attractive Lady Jane, and Opie, after quoting from her own verse 'Song of the Hindustani

Girl', has Madeline free him from his obligations to her. 'I believe my heart is *broken*', she says (v.2, p.213).

Her fortunes suddenly reverse, however, when Lady Jane marries another. Glencarron marries Madeline in a church ceremony, but, alas, she is worn out. Beside her deathbed he berates himself, exclaiming 'You have been the victim of my want of firmness of character, and my irresolution' (v.2, p.321). This 'want of firmness' recalls Mortimer in *The Dangers of Coquetry* and contrasts with Torrington, the firm father of *Temper*, Mr Seymour of *Father and Daughter* and Doctor Norberry of *Adeline Mowbray*. Opie seems to be saying that whereas the last three, as fathers, exercised firmness in the upbringing of their daughters, both Glencarron and Mortimer, as husbands, failed to exercise their duty of care to their wives with sufficient vigour, with fatal results. Husbands clearly had to strike a balance between being insufficiently firm and yet avoiding the harshness of figures such as Berrendale of *Adeline Mowbray*.

The customary Opie deathbed tableau is assembled and the usual scenes of forgiveness and reconciliation are constructed. At this point Opie must have revolted from the predictability of this turgid tale, for Madeline miraculously recovers and lives a life of happiness with the man she has always loved.

Despite manoeuvring by Opie and her friend Southey, *Madeline* was not noticed by the reviewers. She wrote to him twice

asking for a review to appear in the *Quarterly Review*, but whether or not he wrote one, it never appeared.<sup>156</sup>

Mary Mitford's comment about the qualities of *Madeline* is indeed fitting.<sup>157</sup> Mitford writes that she had at one time praised her, together with Maria Edgeworth and Joanne Baillie as being 'three such women [writers] as have seldom adorned one age and one country'. Reading the prose of these middle years, it seems on balance that Mitford's comments indicate the decline of Opie's abilities as a writer of tales. This is reflected not only in the quality of her writing, but also in the sharp decrease in her earnings during this period: whereas *Temper* earned her over £600 and had a run of three thousand copies, *Madeline*, with a run of only fifteen hundred, brought in only one third of that sum. As the years of this middle period progress the predictability of the tales only increases, the experiments she makes with narrative voice and format are often clumsy and the writing becomes more turgid. It seems increasingly plain that she was writing from a financial rather than an artistic motive and that the complexity of her personal life took its toll on her artistic competence.

What is equally evident is that her nineteenth-century writing reflects the complexity of ideologies that arose in response to the shifting power-bases in society during the years after the French revolution.




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<sup>156</sup> Amelia Opie to Robert Southey, 10 March 1822 and 16 March 1822; Huntington Library and Pforzheimer Collection, NYPL respectively.

<sup>157</sup> R. Brinley Johnson, p.170.

## CHAPTER 6

**The Quaker Years, 1825 and After**

**B**rightwell's biography is unequivocal that Amelia Opie became a convinced Quaker in 1825 for the best of reasons.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, her practice of Quakerism, particularly in terms of dress and speech, comprised a constant mediation between polite society and the Society of Friends. One of the objectives of this section of the thesis is to detail this mediation; the other is to review her work after her adoption of Quakerism.

Opie's letters to Elizabeth Fry and J. J. Gurney evince the increasing interest that Quakerism held for her as a means of combatting some pervasive sense of low self-worth: 'I never feel so comforted as when I feel humbled, and experience a deep sense of my own sinfulness', she wrote in January 1824.<sup>2</sup> The letter continues: 'I feel my reliance on my Saviour growing stronger every day, and a sort of loathing of worldly society.' A letter to Gurney, marked 'Private', indicates not only her religious aspirations, but also how she had rearranged her feelings for him after the grief of 1815. This letter shows her desire for the certainty of the 'convinced Christian', which she hopes to achieve under the guidance of Gurney, his sister Priscilla (1785-1821) and William Forster, and continues with an expression of

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<sup>1</sup> See Brightwell, p.172 and ff.

<sup>2</sup> Amelia Opie to Elizabeth Fry, 18 January 1824; Huntington Library.

curiosity as to how ‘two young creatures’, J. J. Gurney and Priscilla Gurney, were ‘prime instruments in leading me to the point where I now am.’ Priscilla, who had died two years earlier, was a powerful and well-known preacher. Opie continues: ‘I often look back with wonder at the celerity with which I divested myself of much of my worldly trappings and assumed the plain dress.’<sup>3</sup> The term ‘convinced’ has a special significance for Quakers, indicating a person who joins the Society rather than having been born into it. Her use of the phrase ‘convinced Christian’ may be taken as indicative of her desire to become formally admitted to the Society.

These announcements come after her friends’ noting Opie’s depression during a prolonged period in the early twenties. Menzies-Wilson and Lloyd corroborate this unhappiness and dissatisfaction with herself by quoting from her journal, which, as part of the Carr collection of manuscripts, is now missing. ‘Passed a self-indulgent day’ and ‘Realised to-day I am utterly vile’ are two of the entries that they quote.<sup>4</sup> Her contemporary Mary Russell Mitford wrote in April 1822 that Opie had the habit of calling herself ‘vile and cold and dead’.<sup>5</sup> It would have been highly indecorous at the time to attribute the distress of a woman in her fifties to her menopause, although today we might make such a connection between the psychological state and

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<sup>3</sup> Amelia Opie to J. J. Gurney, 4 August 1823; Society of Friends’ Library.

<sup>4</sup> Menzies-Wilson & Lloyd, p.218.

<sup>5</sup> R. Brinley Johnson, ed., p.170.

the physiological one, with the rider that the distress must have been all the more acute because its cause was unmentionable.

After reading Brightwell's *Memoirs*, Mitford commented that Opie had made 'a miserable hash of her existence' during the years after she embraced Quakerism, and Mitford's observation provides evidence of Opie's mediation between her two worlds:

Nothing is clearer than the hankering she had after her old artistic and literary world. She even contrived to mix gay parties with May meetings [annual Quaker conferences] to the very last. But the want of congruity jars in the book, and must have jarred still more in actual life; more especially as those Fry and Gurney people – popes male and female in their way – seem to have taken upon them to lecture the dear soul. How she declined in taste and in intelligence after joining the Friends!<sup>6</sup>

Brightwell comments that 'Of the perplexities and anxieties of her mind at this time, her letters ... give sufficient proof' and we thus see great attention paid to the moral career of her subject in a way that is appropriate for her purpose of constructing Amelia Opie as a woman writer of rectitude.<sup>7</sup> Brightwell, it seems clear, had no intention of depicting in her memoirs the tension that Mitford discovered. A full review of Opie's letters over this period certainly show these 'perplexities' when writing to the Gurneys, but also reveals a healthy correspondence with others on a variety of topics including verse, books, publication of her work, Mrs Turner's etching of her, and other matters suggesting an engaged and intelligent life.

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<sup>6</sup> A. G. L'Estrange, *The Life of Mary Russell Mitford* (London: Richard Bentley, 1870), 3 vols., 3, p.293.

<sup>7</sup> Brightwell, p.287.

Brightwell foregrounds how Opie had long been friends with the Gurney family, particularly Elizabeth Fry (1780-1845) and Joseph John Gurney. Gurney himself was known and admired as a man who embodied all the virtues of non-conformist ministry, who travelled and wrote extensively about Christian morality and whose Journal contains such entries as that for 16 December 1845, which says in part: 'I pray that I may be enabled to maintain the whole blessed Truth as it is in Jesus in the firmness, yet *patience and meekness* which are in Christ.'<sup>8</sup> The teachings of Gurney, a wealthy banker, made sufficient impact on Quakerism for the more traditionally-minded Quakers, whose particular beliefs Michaelson terms 'conservative evangelism', to name their sect after him.<sup>9</sup> This fusion of free-trade commerce and conservative religious ideology reveals the economically-minded righteousness of an *haute-bourgeoisie* which had little scruple to profit, since it was, as Adam Smith observed, no more than the compensation for the inconvenience and expense of bringing together the three necessary components of production.<sup>10</sup> Smith further validates the growth of capitalism when he points out that

the uniform, constant and uninterrupted effort of every man to better his condition ... is frequently powerful enough to maintain the natural progress of things towards improvement, in spite both of the extravagance of government and of the greatest errors in administration.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> J. B. Braithwaite, facsimile opposite 2, p.485.

<sup>9</sup> Michaelson, p.135.

<sup>10</sup> Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, ed. Andrew Skinner (London: Penguin, 1986), p.151.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p.443.



The tacit permission thus given to manufacturers and financiers – namely that they are operating for the common good as well as their own – squares nicely with the frugality-amid-wealth mindset of the wealthy Quaker business families, further reinforced by the non-conformist ethic of work being rewarded by God-given success which ratified the perceived rightness of expansionist capitalism such as Gurney represents.

After Gurney's death his longstanding friend John Alexander wrote of him that 'The loss to this world in the withdrawal such a man, the removal of such an example, the quenching of such a light, is more and greater than any of us can imagine.'<sup>12</sup> Such a man was the intimate friend, advisor and moral example to Amelia Opie, and it was clearly his influence that encouraged her to adopt Quakerism and eventually formally to apply to join the Society. Gurney endorsed her application to the Society in phrases which denote all the distaste that Quakers felt at the time for outward show, worldliness and novel-writing. He stated:

No person had drunk deeper of the cup of fashionable life than she had. Admired for her amiability, her talents and her accomplishments, she was received in London at the houses of many of the nobility, and wherever she went, she was a welcome guest. But she gradually discovered that all her vanities, her place in the great world and her novel-writing in which her reputation was high, must be laid down at the foot of the cross of Christ.<sup>13</sup>

On 4 July 1825 Opie wrote of her draining experience at the Monthly Committee, where she was interrogated on her application to

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<sup>12</sup> Braithwaite, 2, p.516.

<sup>13</sup> Menzies-Wilson & Lloyd, p.218.

join the Society.<sup>14</sup> The members of this committee she names as Gurney, Lucy Aggs and Mr and Mrs Blake. When she describes the meeting as being at 'Lucy Aggs's foundry' we may take her expression metaphorically, since no iron-foundry of that name existed in Norwich at that time. She wrote that Gurney was supportive and that she responded 'conscientiously' to their enquiries. Her application was successful and she became a convinced Friend on 11 August 1825.

Many of her worldly acquaintances reacted to the news of her conversion with a suitably laconic response. Janet Whitney states that 'When Amelia Opie abandoned fashions and went Quaker a few years later, Maria Edgeworth wrote that "Amelia was all-over Quakerized, to the great benefit of her appearance. It is indeed a pretty dress."' <sup>15</sup> Both Margaret MacGregor and Menzies-Wilson and Lloyd put a similar quotation as coming from the pen of Mary Mitford, but the effect is the same: a witty and ironic comment which deliberately focuses on the external appearance rather than the inward decision, and all the more pointed for Opie's love of fine clothes and fashion. On this matter, Harriet Martineau suspected that she saw 'a spice of dandyism in the demure simplicity of her dress' and Menzies-Wilson and Lloyd point out that she continued to 'order the grey satin for her gowns and the green-black silk for her bonnet from Paris'.<sup>16</sup> Another response was

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<sup>14</sup> Amelia Opie to Alfred Corder, 4 July 1825; Society of Friends' Library.

<sup>15</sup> Whitney, p.206.

<sup>16</sup> Harriet Martineau, *Autobiography* (London: Longman, 1871), 3 vols., 2, p.277; Menzies-Wilson & Lloyd, p.217.

from the French artist Pierre-Jeanne David d'Angers, a long-standing friend of Opie's (not to be confused with Jacques-Louis David, the artist of the French Revolution) who commented that the Quaker cap, so like a revolutionist's Phrygian bonnet, gave her '*un air classique.*' David subsequently carved a medallion showing a profile of Opie in her Quaker cap, and to which she refers in her letters.<sup>17</sup> The medallion displeased the righteous Lucy Aggs precisely because the cap looked like a Phrygian bonnet – an indication of the conservative ideology of the Quakers at the time and emphasising their distancing themselves from other, more left-leaning radical groups who were generally anti-religion.<sup>18</sup>

One of the most significant characteristics of Quakers was (and remains) attention to their manner of speech. Patricia Howell Michaelson investigates how Quakers' 'plain speech' contrasts with the polite speech of the day, especially in its use by women. Among the differences are that honorifics and titles are never used, in order to emphasise people's equality in the eyes of God. Similarly, 'because they believed their lives were directed by God, they couldn't say something happened "luckily", "fortunately" or "by chance".'<sup>19</sup> Further, the Quaker sociolect was 'an unchanging mode of language in all circumstances.'<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Amelia Opie to Eliza Alderson, 13 July 1829 and 24 July 1829; Huntington Library.

<sup>18</sup> Amelia Opie to Eliza Alderson dd. 9 December 1829: Huntington Library.

<sup>19</sup> Michaelson, p.146.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p.120.

By contrast, Michaelson elaborates a model of women's language at the time of Jane Austen based on a wide variety of sources, from eighteenth and early nineteenth century comments by Johnson, Addison, Fordyce and others to modern analysts such as Deborah Tannen and Luce Irigaray. The characteristics that emerge, both positive and negative, are of loquaciousness, quantity and emptiness, an exaggerated vocabulary, positive politeness, inoffensiveness, a guarded use of wit, and facilitativeness – 'doing the conversational work'.<sup>21</sup> She demonstrates how Quaker 'plain speech' is opposed to such linguistic parameters: 'Plainness of speech is indeed the opposite of conventional politeness. The Quaker sociolect rejects the face-saving conventions of [the speech of] mainstream society,' and indeed is 'the very opposite of women's language'.<sup>22</sup> Michaelson has analysed the transition that Opie, 'known for her verbal stylishness' made in her speech and letters to accommodate the demands of Quakerism.<sup>23</sup> Her conclusion is that Opie 'adopted a very mediated form of Quaker language, used for particular ends'.<sup>24</sup> This is clear from the evidence of the differing styles of discourse in her letters, which extend to content as well as to idelect: the letters to Quakers are not only written in a studied plain speech, but contain numerous references to faith. By contrast, her letters to her cousins Sarah, Eliza and Tom

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp.121,152,125,126 and 152 respectively.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp.147 and 121 respectively.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p.164.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

Alderson are informal: humorous, admonishing, gossipy and thoroughly familial. Her letters to friends amongst the nobility, such as Lord and Lady Boileau, are of worldly matters. These three different stylistic strands appear consistently in her correspondence from the mid-twenties onwards.

Michaelson identifies a male discursive style which 'came to be the opposite of polite forms that were increasingly stigmatized as French and effeminate ... a style that is plain, straightforward, dense rather than elaborated'.<sup>25</sup> Using Austen's *Emma* (1816) as an example, Michaelson points out the distinction between the 'plain, "manly" speech' of Mr Knightley and that of 'Frank Churchill's gallicisms and Emma's father's effeminate mode'.<sup>26</sup> Plain speech thus carries resonances of male rather than female styles of address, and Opie would later adapt this to produce writing that trespasses on male domains of scholarship, particularly in her *A Cure for Scandal, or Detraction Displayed* (1828).

Opie herself records her first use of plain speech in a letter to Elizabeth Fry dated, in the Quaker way, '3<sup>rd</sup> mo., 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1824' (i.e. March 2, 1824) – clearly a pivotal moment in her adoption of Quakerism, when

a stranger, chancing to come and call on her that morning, she spoke the plain language to him and had continued to do so ever since; and she says, 'Nor have I a misgiving, but feel so calm and satisfied, that I am convinced I have done right; and now I feel utterly cast for comfort, support and guidance, on the

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<sup>25</sup> Michaelson, private communication, 2<sup>nd</sup> November 1999.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

searcher of hearts, and the Great Shepherd, the merciful Redeemer.<sup>27</sup>

Notwithstanding the vehemence of the religious rhetoric, appropriate to its intended reader, it is not difficult to find examples of Opie's deviations from plain speech. She continued to use honorifics, both directly and in reference: her letters are replete with such expressions as 'Oh dear Lord Morpeth! How glad I am to see thee!' (1848).<sup>28</sup> Conversely, her notebook contained several references to people by their initials, although titles such as 'Lady Cork' and 'Mrs.T.' are still evident (1833).<sup>29</sup> In 1824, Henry Crabb Robinson wrote in his diary for 14 July:

Called on Mrs. Opie, who had then become a Quakeress. She received me very kindly, but as a Quaker in dress and diction. I found her agreeable and not materially changed. Her dress had something coquettish in it ... yet she was not conscious, I dare say, of any unworthy motive. She talked in her usual graceful and affectionate manner. She mentioned *Lord* Gifford – surely a slip of the tongue.<sup>30</sup>

Robinson's mischievous remark highlights one of the consistent tensions of Opie's Quaker life: that between the earnestness of her religiosity, expressed in both her correspondence and her published works unwaveringly and with increasing dogmatism as she ages, and her love of fine things and titled people. A month later, Robinson was able to comment that 'Mrs Opie has lost none of her attractiveness by

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<sup>27</sup> Brightwell, p.198.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.379.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p.303.

<sup>30</sup> Thos. Sadler, ed., *Diary, Reminiscences and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson* (Boston: James Osgood, 1871), 2 vols., 2, p.9.

assuming Quaker garb,' and after a further five months concluded that 'Mrs Opie is, to my mind, greatly improved by her change of habits.'<sup>31</sup>

In October 1826, Robert Southey records her use of the Quaker plain speech as 'corrupting the King's English with more malice prepense ... she *thou'd* and *thee'd* with great intrepidity [but] the sinful word 'Lady' slipped not infrequently from her lips... I like her in spite of her Quakerism, nay, perhaps because of it.'<sup>32</sup> The importance of linguistic consistency for Quakers was emphasised by an admonishment to them from an author concerned with the way some Quakers in Opie's time were drifting from the patterns established by their founder, George Fox.

How can you act so inconsistently with the profession you are making as to salute persons by the title of Mr. or Mrs., bow, and take off your hats to them ... thus violating and trampling underfoot those precious testimonies, the faithful support of which cost many of our predecessors the loss of all in this world that is most dear?<sup>33</sup>

Other commentators were less sure that Opie's conversion to Quakerism arose from such pure motives. Joseph John Gurney's first wife, Jane Birkbeck had died in 1821. In his biography of the Gurney family, Hare wrote that Joseph John Gurney 'did not realise what everyone else saw, that [Opie] greatly wished to become the second Mrs. Joseph John Gurney.'<sup>34</sup> As possible corroboration, the

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<sup>31</sup> Crabb Robinson, p. 311.

<sup>32</sup> Kenneth Curry, ed., *New Letters of Robert Southey* (New York: Columbia Press, 1965), p.108.

<sup>33</sup> Anthony Benezet (attr.), *Observations of Plainness and Simplicity in Conduct and Conversation in Accordance with the Principles of the Society of Friends* (Stockport: Claye, n.d.), p.3.

<sup>34</sup> Hare, 2, p.13.

correspondence to Dawson Turner in 1822 about the importance of modest dress and plain yet flattering hairstyle in the etching Mary Turner was preparing of her may indicate her wish to appear suitable as a Quaker wife, or simply to be up-to-date.<sup>35</sup> Conversely, Opie's letter to Corder indicated her reconciliation to a single life.<sup>36</sup> Although their friendship was intense, it seems clear that they had arrived at a platonic understanding. Crabb Robinson wrote of meeting Gurney in 1826, and relates how he spoke of Mrs Opie 'very kindly, but not like a lover or one who was about to become a lover.'<sup>37</sup>

The tensions between the tropes of polite speech and plain speech, and between the sober and modest Quaker dress and Crabb Robinson's impression of coquettishness both support Michaelson's view that Opie held a mediated position between the polite world and that of the Quakers. In this regard, Hare's speculation as to motive may be dismissed on the grounds that the couple's *crise de coeur* had occurred in 1815 and was now resolved.

A shift in someone's ideology is often made firmer by an encounter with a figure from that person's past. For Opie, this opportunity arose when she visited her longtime confidante and mother-substitute Susannah Taylor, who, by 1823, was fatally ill. Opie's letter to Gurney dated 11 February clearly shows her ideological realignment. She accuses Taylor of 'preparing as it were to

<sup>35</sup> See Appendix C: Letters, esp. those for 1822.

<sup>36</sup> Amelia Opie to Alfred Corder, 4 July 1825, *op. cit.*

<sup>37</sup> Robinson, p.336.



act a sort of *Heathen philosopher's* death', which manner of dying, 'polite and attentive to the last! *Full of petits soins* to men' can be seen as that of a fearless Revolutionist *philosophe*. For Opie it holds only horror, for Mrs Taylor does not mention 'her *Saviour*' and, furthermore, Opie 'was shocked to see the *love of display* uppermost on what is probably her *couch of death!*'<sup>38</sup>

The italics are Opie's, and prompt the thought that for a person consciously employing plain speech – particularly in addressing Gurney – the frequent italicisation must be seen as an aberration: as Michaelson says, an adaptive and mediated use of the Quaker sociolect.<sup>39</sup> The message itself has an undertone of concern for Mrs Taylor, but is couched in terms of righteous counsel ignored, thereby emphasising Opie's evangelical Quakerism in the manner which was to become known among Friends as Gurneyite. There is no hint of recognition of Susannah Taylor's elected mode of death as being something which Opie herself would have wholeheartedly endorsed in previous years, and one sees that superficially, at least, Opie has taken on the language characteristics of her latter-day mentor at the expense of the ideological values of her earlier mentor. Her distancing herself from the values Mrs Taylor represents is further evidence of Opie's collusion with conservative Quaker rhetoric.

At the time of making the commitment to the Quakers, Opie had been working on a new novel, to be called *The Painter and His Wife*,

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<sup>38</sup> Opie to Gurney, 11 February 1823; Gurney MSS, 336, Friends' Library, London.

<sup>39</sup> Michaelson, p.122.

which she was obliged to abandon in compliance with the Quakers' proscription on novel-writing. This compliance is consistent with the way in which Opie, like Austen, minimises the act of writing, as the excerpts from her memoir of her husband and of Mrs Roberts have demonstrated. Of this tale, the manuscript of which also forms a part of the missing Carr collection, the following is known: it was to have been in epistolary form – a technique she had worked with in *Madeline* – and the narrative would concern two women who both loved the same man. Menzies-Wilson and Lloyd, who were able to examine the manuscript before its loss, comment that the tale

was interesting because it revealed the secrets of some of Amelia's success in the world. Only a woman who had made a business of understanding men could have written as Amelia did. The chief characters in the book ... were the passionate and captivating Emily Sawbridge and the lovely but insipid Maria Delavel, who had become the betrothed of the man Emily loved.<sup>40</sup>

MacGregor mentions this incomplete tale, although her comment on the main characters, even to their names, differs from the one above, despite the fact that she is working from the same manuscript source:

The manuscript of the tale, found among Mrs Opie's literary remains, consists of ten letters and a few pages of straightforward narrative. ... The situation is that of two young women in love with the same man. Eudora Villars is the usual type of virtue and prudence; Marcia Delaval, with her extravagance, her disregard of convention, her uncontrolled emotions, is patterned closely on Corinne.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Menzies-Wilson & Lloyd, p.212.

<sup>41</sup> MacGregor, p.86.

Both biographical sources are in agreement that Opie had to give up copy money to the value of one thousand pounds arising from advance orders for the work, and did so as token of her commitment to her new religious conviction. The source for this is common to both biographies: a comment by Mary Mitford.<sup>42</sup> Brightwell does not mention anything of 'The Painter and His Wife' except to note that Opie was working on another novel at this time, but 'it was never completed'.<sup>43</sup>

It is clear from all three biographies that Opie felt she had to make clear to the Gurneys that work on the new novel had ceased. Both MacGregor and Menzies-Wilson and Lloyd quote from the letter which Brightwell includes.<sup>44</sup> Dated 6 December 1823 and addressed to Elizabeth Fry, it affirms that although Longman had advertised the work, it was 'only begun work [and that it] is not written, *nor ever will be.*' The letter continues by saying how pleased Joseph and Catherine Gurney were with 'my new work, on "Lying in all its branches"'.<sup>45</sup> Evidently Opie felt the need to impress on the Gurneys the totality of her writerly reform, all the more so since the unpleasant reception given to *Madeline*. Menzies-Lloyd and Wilson comment that

Never again was Amelia to write those romantic stories of love, pathos and passion which had endeared her to a sentimental public. Only dull and didactic tales would henceforth come from her pen.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See L'Estrange, 2, pp.198-199.

<sup>43</sup> Brightwell, p.190.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Amelia Opie to Elizabeth Fry, 6 December 1823: Huntington Library.

<sup>46</sup> Menzies-Lloyd & Wilson, p.213.

A mention must be made of Opie's contributions to what MacGregor describes as 'a new sort of publication – the annual', which first made its appearance in 1823.<sup>47</sup> Opie contributed extensively to one entitled *Friendship's Offering* from its first edition of 1824 until 1829, submitting songs, hymns and verse. She was also a contributor to three other annuals, *The Spirit and Manners of the Age*, *The Amulet*, and *The Literary Souvenir*, while *The European Magazine* also furnished her with a market for her verse. Annuals aimed to present a topicality, and Opie's inclusion in so many can be seen as an endorsement of her continuing popularity. A letter to Thomas Hood concerns his rejection of a prose tale for *The Gem* in 1828.<sup>48</sup> She rather crossly points out that she was 'not a volunteer', but had been asked to submit something the previous year to the former editor, which had been found acceptable. Ten years later, she wrote to J. J. Gurney on one of his American tours, informing him that she had contributed to an annual 'at Dr. Sprague's desire'.<sup>49</sup> Sprague was the minister of the Presbyterian Church at Albany, New York.

In 1825 Opie published two works, one of which was the *Illustrations of Lying in All Its Branches* published by Longman in two

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<sup>47</sup> MacGregor, p.96.

<sup>48</sup> Amelia Opie to Thomas Hood, 10 August 1828; Society of Friends' Library, London: Ms Box 12/1/1.

<sup>49</sup> Amelia Opie to J. J. Gurney, 25 October 1838; Society of Friends' Library: Mss 434/1.

volumes in 1825 and dedicated, as before, to her father. This publication introduced her new position as a writer of moral works, and, as MacGregor points out, the critic of *The London Magazine* was quick to notice the change.<sup>50</sup>

Amelia is a late convert to close caps and dove-coloured lutestring, and having been a pretty considerable number of years addicted to gay parties, excessive novels, the luxuries of society and gorgeous apparel, she feels called upon to be doubly diligent in her new character; and to her anxiety to atone for certain previous publications not founded on fact, we presume it is owing that she now has taken to writing good books.<sup>51</sup>

Not only is this work an exhaustive treatise on a vice which has preoccupied her previous writings, it is also an ingenious solution to the situation she found herself in – that of a fiction-writer, almost wholly reliant on her income from writing, who voluntarily joins a sect which prohibits the writing of fiction – for she employs illustrative tales to reinforce her analysis of types of lying. In her Preface, Opie finds it prudent to apologise for ‘calling lying and lies by their real names’, but justifies this by pointing out the need for language to be ‘most consonant to the *strict truth*.’<sup>52</sup> In this way, she is rationalising her use of language in a way that the Quakers would find to be appropriate to their requirement of plain speech and truthfulness, and this small example is indicative of the manner in which she is negotiating the requirements of Quaker discourse.

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<sup>50</sup> MacGregor, p.93.

<sup>51</sup> *The London Magazine*, New Series, 11 (1825), p.103.

<sup>52</sup> Amelia Opie, *Illustrations of Lying, in All its Branches*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, 1825), 1, p.viii. Subsequent quotations are from this edition, and page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

The first section of the book classifies lies by their various types: 'Active and Passive Lies of Vanity'; 'Lies of Flattery'; 'Lies of Fear'; 'Lies of Benevolence'; 'Lies of Convenience'; 'Lies of Interest'; lies of 'Malignity' (two categories here); 'Lies of Wantonness'; 'Practical Lies'. This disquisition accounts for the first eleven chapters of the work, and the format is the same in each: a brief definitive discussion followed by an illustrative tale. One of the tales, 'White Lies' had been published earlier in *New Tales* (1818): the others may have been written especially for the new publication, or – and Opie had done this with many of the poems in *The Warrior's Return* (1808) – they may have been tales written many years earlier and unpublished: writers who publish everything they write are rare indeed.

Unfortunately, there is no clue in any correspondence to substantiate either possibility. If they were written earlier, as with 'White Lies', that would further remove Opie from any charges of infringing the rules of the Society. Several of the tales which appear in *Illustrations of Lying* were later published in 1845 as *The Stage Coach and Other Tales*, and 'White Lies' was also published between its own boards with 'The Soldier's Return' in the same year.

'White Lies' may be taken as typical of the kind of tale Opie uses to illustrate her points in *Lying*: there is the blanket indication of abhorrence which requires agreement by the listener, such as when the virtuous character, in this case a Mr Field, exclaims, 'I hate lying, it is such a mean vice; do you not hate it, Miss Musgrave?', to which she can only reply, 'I do' (2, p.101). Then there is the accusation of lying,

accompanied by a character judgement of the liar, as when Field later says to Miss Musgrave: '... though you are handsome as an angel, you lie like a chamber-maid!' The consequences of lying are depicted as terrible and out of proportion to the lie: in this tale, a duel is arranged, although the possibly fatal outcome is avoided when Miss Musgrave confesses her lie (2, p.109). The class slur implicit in Field's remark is given further treatment when Miss Musgrave is asked by a footman to say that he was at an appointed place when he was not. 'Do you expect me to lie for your sake?' she demands, with all the outraged authority of a social superior. His reply is quick and accurate: 'Why not, miss? I have often told my master lies, and other people too, for yours' (2, p.121). The moment has echoes of the incident in *Adeline Mowbray*, where Adeline feels unable to lie about being married in the 'character' she writes for Mary Warner, her maid.<sup>53</sup>

In the second section of *Lying*, Opie suddenly appears as the student of moral philosophy. The shift in style is innovative: the reader has not seen her write in an academic fashion until this point. Her range of reading and grasp of argument reveals a mind far more penetrative than might have been supposed from her other writing, and this is the more remarkable since her formal education, like that of other women of the day, did not trespass into male domains of reason and rhetoric. Michaelson has pointed out the similarities between Quaker discourse and male discourse and also how, when Quaker women employed plain speech, they were not perceived as threatening

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<sup>53</sup> Opie, *Adeline Mowbray*, 1999 edn., 2, p.100

to the male hegemony. Here we see a situation where Opie is able to utilize a Quaker rhetoric to produce serious and reasoned argument that has all the characteristics of male scholarly writing.

She quotes from Francis Bacon's essay 'On Truth', to substantiate her calls for 'truth, or rather veracity in civil business' (vol.2, p.98);<sup>54</sup> also from Joseph Addison, whom she finds disappointing as a source of moral wisdom, commenting that he 'appears to have done very little as an advocate for spontaneous truth, [having been] much less zealous than either Hawkesworth or Johnson' (p.99). The letter in *The Spectator* from which she quotes, no.352, which deals with truth and reputation, is in fact attributed to Richard Steele.<sup>55</sup> Having perused Dr Watts's list of moral writers, she further includes mention of the following works: *The Adventurer*, founded by John Hawkesworth to be a periodical in the style of his friend and mentor Johnson's *The Rambler*, except aiming to appeal to only the 'highest and purest' in his readers;<sup>56</sup> Boswell's observations of Johnson's consistent regard for the truth;<sup>57</sup> *Sketches of the History of Man* (1774) by Henry Home, Lord Kames, whose moral philosophy she would have found attractive because it departs from the classical debate between primitivism and Hobbsian progress and promotes a

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<sup>54</sup> Sir Francis Bacon *The Essayes or Counsels, Civill and Morall*, ed. by M Kiernan, (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), p.8.

<sup>55</sup> D. F. Bond, ed., *The Spectator* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1965), 3, letter 352, Monday, April 14, 1712.

<sup>56</sup> See J. L. Abbott, *John Hawkesworth* (Madison: Univ. Wisconsin Press, 1982).

<sup>57</sup> G. B. Hill, ed., *Boswell's Life of Johnson*. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1934), 5 vols., 4, p.334.



third way in which man, having fallen from a golden age, retained the possibility of attaining perfection;<sup>58</sup> and *Moral Philosophy* by William Paley, a work which, like her own, aimed to 'instruct in the duties of everyday life' rather than engage in metaphysical dialogue.<sup>59</sup> Her use of Paley is to construct a demonstration of the distinction between morality and legality, employing such quotations as a 'lie may be pernicious in its general tendency; and therefore criminal, though it produce no particular or visible mischief to anyone.'<sup>60</sup> Her academic style becomes evident in such phrases as

I feel entire unity of sentiment with Paley on all that he has advanced, except in those passages which are printed in Italic; but Chalmers and Scott have given a complete refutation of [this part of Paley's argument].<sup>61</sup>

Opie's use of Kames is interesting because his work was expressly written for the readership that she herself aimed at: the frugal, literate and ambitious middle-class, 'removed from the corruption of opulence and from the depression of bodily labour [but] bent on a useful knowledge'.<sup>62</sup> Paley, too, is particularly appropriate for Opie because, as one critic wrote, he felt very keenly that 'men laboured under a strong obligation to relieve the distress of the poor.'<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Henry Home, Lord Kames, *Sketches on the History of Man* (Edinburgh: 1774), 2 vols.

<sup>59</sup> M. L. Clarke, *Paley* (London: SPCK, 1974), p.57.

<sup>60</sup> Opie, 2, p.126.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, p.130.

<sup>62</sup> Home, 1, p.v.

<sup>63</sup> D. L. LeMahieu, *The Mind of William Paley* (Lincoln: Univ. Nebraska, 1976), p.134.

As well as being a constant motif throughout her fiction writing, poor relief was something that Opie involved herself in very energetically.

MacGregor notes how

[Opie] was a member of the Sick Poor Committee, served as a collector for the Bible Society and interested herself in the Infant School at Bracondale ... and in the Magdalen Society. Probably her most extensive work was done in connection with the Norwich Ladies' Association for Prison Reform.<sup>64</sup>

The latter reference is to her prison visiting with Elizabeth Fry, referred to in an important letter to Southey in 1830, in which she agrees to participate with Fry in his project for hospital reform. 'Sick of prison duties' which seem to do no good, she was aware of the dire conditions in the hospitals: 'such is the state of the London hospitals that no *modest* female *dares* go to them.'<sup>65</sup>

Her discussion of 'Extracts' (chapters XIV and XV) concludes by citing Dr. Reid and Dr Thomas Brown (not Browne the seventeenth-century philosopher, although she adds the final -e, but her contemporary of Edinburgh).<sup>66</sup> She uses Brown's construct of 'veracity' as 'a duty' to investigate the power of language, pointing out that it is 'profitless ... but for the truth that dictates it'.<sup>67</sup> To abuse this power by lying is, in Brown's words, which she uses, to 'throw back

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<sup>64</sup> MacGregor, p.92.

<sup>65</sup> Amelia Opie to Robert Southey, 13 January 1830; Wordsworth Collection, Grasmere.

<sup>66</sup> Thomas Reid, DD, *Essays on the Power of the Human Mind* (Edinburgh: 1803); Dr Thomas Brown, *Lectures on the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (Edinburgh: 1820).

<sup>67</sup> Opie, p.141.

the whole race into that barbarism from which they have emerged.<sup>68</sup>

Her argument builds to question the relativity of lying, consistent with the analysis of different types of lies in the first part of the book. She takes an absolute position, concluding that 'there is only one wrong and one right ... the utterers of little lies [may be] with justice called liars, because they show that they are strangers to the restraining and inimitable principle of truth' (p.151). This is reinforced shortly after with the phrase 'that IMPOSSIBLE thing, an INNOCENT lie' (p.154).

Having established the moral absolute, her disquisition continues with a chapter entitled 'Religion the Only Basis of Truth'. Her first task is to dismiss the idea of a morality without religion:

It has been asserted that morality might exist in all its power and purity were there no such thing as religion, since it is conducive to the earthly interests and happiness of man. But, are moral motives sufficient to protect us in times of particular temptation? (p.166)

She demolishes this idea by quoting from Leviticus, Psalms, John, Colossians, Proverbs, James, Isaiah, II Kings and the Acts (pp.168-172), asserting that the 'only means by which the possibility of resisting the temptation to utter falsehood might be [through] obedience to the will of God' (p.174). She moves on to illustrate this by citing at length three examples of martyrs who preferred to take an absolutist position in defence of their beliefs rather than compromise them: Jerome of Prague, a Wycliffian; Thomas Bilney, who rejected his ordination to preach in fields and streets prior to his execution in the Lollards' Pit, under St. Leonard's Hill, Norwich; and Thomas

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<sup>68</sup> Brown, 4, p.225.

Cranmer, the victim of Queen Mary's religious persecutions. Her source for these examples is given as 'Maclane's Eccles. History' – probably Archibald Maclaine's *A Supplement to Dr. Mosheim's Ecclesiastical History* of 1768. She further cites the examples of St. Peter, a man aware of his own sinfulness, who tells Jesus 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!' only to find courage through faith (p.236), Daniel (p.241), and the early Quakers:

The early FRIENDS were exemplary instances of the power of faith to lift the Christian above all fear of man [and] were known to be persons *who would rather have died than spoken a lie.* (p.243; her capitals and italics)

Opie thus reinforces her own position with the Quakers by aligning the early Friends with the Christian martyrs in the name of truth. She is also consistent with the Gurneyite emphasis on atonement, as her treatment of St Peter reveals. Of equal interest is her use of plain language to elide into male domains of discourse in order to advocate an absolutist morality.

Although Brightwell does not mention other, more problematic, works such as *Madeleine*, she records the beneficial effect of *Lying*: she quotes from a letter to Elizabeth Fry, in which Opie says: 'Joseph and Catherine [Gurney] are highly pleased with my new work on 'Lying, in all its branches', and they think it must do good'.<sup>69</sup> Brightwell further describes the format of the book as 'novel and ingenious', and claims for it 'the best of all sanctions, that of *success*,'

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<sup>69</sup> Amelia Opie to Elizabeth Fry, 6 December 1823; Huntington Library. Cited in Brightwell, p.192.

continuing by relating an incident 'some few years afterwards' when some Americans to whom Opie was introduced assured her that it 'was universally acknowledged to have done good in their country' (ibid.). We take this remark at its face value, setting aside Americans' customary confusion of adjective and adverb and the alternative meaning that this would suggest. Once more Brightwell thus reinforces the image of Opie as a worthy and moral woman writer. Longman's records show a single run of 1500 copies for the work, although it was also taken up by American publishers later.

The other publication in 1825 was *Tales of the Pemberton Family*, written particularly for children and, as though to make the break from novel-writing more evident, published not by Longman but the London publisher Harvey & Darton, and by Wilkin of Norwich.

At this point it is appropriate to outline the Quaker view on educating children. In an effort to indicate the special nature of the Quakers' position, Harold Loukes makes the helpful analysis of attitudes to religion as 'dogmatic, anti-dogmatic, and undogmatic'.<sup>70</sup> Having rejected the first two positions, the Quaker must take up the more difficult burden of the last. Loukes continues:

The first Friends advanced the principle that the very search for an external religious authority was misconceived. To depend on an external authority was to shift from the individual the religious responsibility which only he (*sic*) could exercise. ... For the authority of the priest and book, the Quakers substituted the authority of the Inward Light of Christ, by which they meant an illumination of the spirit, a heightened sensitiveness and

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<sup>70</sup> Harold Loukes, *Friends and their Children* (London: Harrap, 1958), p.7.

power of judgement, a clearness of perception and capacity for response gained from a deep devotion to the person of Christ.<sup>71</sup>

Since, in the Quaker view, one person has no power to determine the religious and moral perspectives of another, Quaker parents are unable to determine these things for their children. 'There is thus a need for instruction and nurture,' says Loukes, 'but with the emphasis laid on understanding and not on passive acceptance. The child will be shown, not told'<sup>72</sup>. The Quaker values of integrity, truthfulness and pacifism – the last tenet barring censoriousness of another person – are to be apprehended by the child by observation and reflection. 'They are to be known, as early Friends would say, experimentally', or as we might say today, experientially.<sup>73</sup> The purpose of a Quaker education, then, was to open the mind rather than close it by dogmatic statements. As Loukes puts it, 'Man cannot dignify ignorance by calling it faith'. This empirical attitude made the early Quakers very open to the study of science: any science/religion dilemma, as was articulated later in the nineteenth century over such matters as evolution/creation, was, to the Quakers, 'an unreal question', since the object of their study of science was 'a search for God at work in the world'.<sup>74</sup>

Such a need for showing, not telling would point readily to the writing of a book of moral tales for children, and this is what Opie

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p.13.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p.14.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p.19.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p.20.

produced in *Tales of the Pemberton Family*. The subtitle 'For the use of Children' reinforces its didactic purpose, as does Opie's remark on p.39 that 'a story is nothing without a moral' and the observation that 'the only true pleasures are those which please in recollection'.<sup>75</sup> The book size is small, the font size is larger than usual at about 12 point and there are a number of line drawings, the frontispiece being tinted. The stories themselves, in a bucolic setting that might be the rural Norfolk that Opie knew well, centre around the family of the Pembertons, a family noble in both senses of the word. Lady Pemberton is described as 'wise and pious', with 'a careful eye' (p.3). Her two sons are paired, in typical fashion: one who does, one who doesn't – in this case give of his sweets to help a poor family. 'Self-denial,' remarks the narrator, 'is the foundation of all true generosity.' The boy who refused to share his sweets eats them all greedily and achieves his nemesis by becoming ill through doing so. This pairing is not only a feature of many of Opie's adult tales, but also of perhaps the best-known collection of tales for children of the time, Thomas Day's *Sandford and Merton* (1783).<sup>76</sup>

Lady Pemberton, as one would expect, regularly visits the poor in her parish. On one such expedition she encounters a woman and her children. The woman's story is of a bad marriage against parents'

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<sup>75</sup> Amelia Opie, *Tales of the Pemberton Family* (London: Harvey & Darton and Norwich, S.Wilkin, 1825), p.1. Subsequent quotations are from this edition, and page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

<sup>76</sup> Thomas Day, *The History of Sandford and Merton* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1977), 3 vols.

wishes to a soldier (cf. *Father and Daughter*) who became dissipated and died in a debtors' prison. The poor woman, however, does not castigate her husband for her impoverishment. Rather, she points out that she knows her place and her duty: 'It is a wife's duty to throw a veil over the faults of her husband, be he living or dead,' she says in response to Lady Pemberton's questions (p.31). Knowing place and duty is a highly significant characteristic which is duly rewarded by the bountiful Lady, who promises several good works to her grateful auditors because they are deserving people. The greatness of God and one's duty to be aware of this – which the poor family readily acknowledge – is a central strand of the narrative. Despite the material benefits that the poor family will enjoy, however, the reader senses that many strings are attached. To a reader from our own time, Lady Pemberton comes across as an interfering, insensitive and haughty person, confident in her own sense of bounty, particularly expressed when she looks around the humble cottage and remarks decisively: 'I shall move you.' Her wisdom and piety seem to need to be told rather than shown, and the telling is so heavy-handed as to indicate a writer ignorant of the acute sensibilities of children.

Another story features the charmingly-named boy, Herbert Mildmay. Herbert is on his way to see a balloon ascent with some pals, an event which Opie herself had witnessed on 29 June 1802.<sup>77</sup> As he leaves the village, his dog is run over by the cart carrying the party and suffers a broken leg. Despite his disappointment, Herbert elects to

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<sup>77</sup> Earland, p.170.



stay and help his dog rather than go to the ascent. The Pembertons encounter him as they drive through the village on their way to see the balloon, hear his tale, take him home with the dog and then allow him to accompany them to the ascent where he has a better vantage point with them than he would have had with his common friends. The noble family, finding him a boy of natural morality, ready intelligence and kind-heartedness, take him under their wing, promising him an education. In this story the moral is more ably shown rather than told, although the condescension of the do-gooders is clear in the narrative – a reflection of the nature of charity in the times. Opie's writing indicates the shift in her ideology: the discourse of the radical Dissenter of the 1790s, advocating democracy and even revolution, has now become the discourse of the conservative Dissenter advocating a social stasis with its inequalities lubricated by charity for the deserving poor. This is a direct precursor of the view taken by the Unitarian writer Elizabeth Gaskell in such works as *Mary Barton* twenty-three years later, although Gaskell's analysis of the social tensions in her novel for adult readers is more complex. The importance of the duty of charity for women and the relationship between having and giving is made clear by Donna T. Andrew's article '*Noblesse Oblige: Female Charity in an Age of Sentiment*'.<sup>78</sup> It is also brought into sharp focus by Opie's correspondence, notably a letter of 1829 to Joanne Baillie, of 1844 to Sir John Boileau and, most acutely, by a note of 1848

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<sup>78</sup> Donna T. Andrew, '*Noblesse Oblige: Female Charity in an Age of Sentiment*' in J. Brewer and S. Staves, eds., *Early Modern Conceptions of Property* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp.275-300.

addressed to a 'Dear Friend', explaining that Opie, apparently charged with distributing some form of charitable relief, perhaps in connection with the Sick Poor Committee, has refused assistance to a man who, she thinks, has applied before under a different name.<sup>79</sup> John Archer writes of the apparently incessant hardship suffered by the poor in Norfolk at this time, and the motives of those who performed acts of charity.<sup>80</sup>

In 1825, Opie followed up this venture into the new market of children's literature with a long poem dealing with a subject that was close to the heart of many Quakers, especially that of her mentor Joseph John Gurney, that of slavery: 'The Black Man's Lament, or How to Make Sugar.' While this thesis has hitherto restricted itself to Opie's prose writing, I feel that an exception has to be made for this poem, since it focuses on the important issue of Abolition, with which Opie was heavily involved at this time, and about which she wrote no published prose. Haydon's portrait of the assembly at the 1840 Anti-Slavery Convention, reproduced in Midgeley, shows her seated, third from left.<sup>81</sup> Opie also refers to her involvement in Abolitionism in several letters.<sup>82</sup>

<sup>79</sup> See Appendix C: Letters.

<sup>80</sup> See John E. Archer, *By a Flash and a Scare* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), esp. pp.56-57.

<sup>81</sup> Clare Midgeley, *Women Against Slavery: the British Campaigns 1780-1870* (London: Routledge, 1992), p.80.

<sup>82</sup> See Appendix C: Letters, notably the following: 6 May 1835 to H Briggs; 13 March 1838 to Lord Brougham; 25 March 1838 to J. J. Gurney; 11 June 1840 to Lucy Aggs (?); 25 June 1840 to J. J. Gurney; 29 June 1840 to an un-named recipient;

As with *Tales of the Pemberton Family*, this publication is evidently intended to be an instructive work for children: the font size is quite large at approximately fourteen point and on almost every page is a handsome handcoloured drawing. In Opie's poem, these illustrations form a graphic sequence which complements the Black man's narrative as he describes how he was brought to the West Indies in the crowded slave ship, his landing and being sold, his waiting in line wearing leg-irons, a whipping, and the processes of making sugar: hoeing, planting, manuring, cutting down the cane, the bruising mill, boiling the cane juice, filling the casks and shipping. The copy of Opie's poem available in the British Library is published jointly with other items on the oppression of slaves including 'The Negro's Complaint' by William Cowper (1731-1800), and 'a Narrative of Remarkable Incidents in the Life of Solomon Bayley, formerly a Slave in the State of Delaware, N.A., written by himself.'<sup>83</sup> Although this appears to be an anthology, no compiler's name is given. The work is indexed by the Library under Opie's name, although there is no mention of her working on such an anthology in her correspondence.

The slave trade had been abolished as far as Britain was concerned in 1808, after bills introduced by William Wilberforce in 1789, 1791, 1792, 1795 and 1804 had been defeated. Slave labour persisted on the West Indies sugar plantations just as opposition to it

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1 July 1840, also un-named; 1 September 1843 to Lord Brougham; 15 February 1850 to Lady Boileau; 11 October 1851 to Miss Cogan.

<sup>83</sup> Amelia Opie, *The Black Man's Lament and Other Works* (London: Harvey & Darton, 1825).

persisted in Britain, particularly among the Dissenting population. Slaves under British control were not to be liberated until Wilberforce's Emancipation Bill became enacted in 1833. In the United States, where abolitionist pressure was also active, Lincoln proclaimed emancipation on the first of January 1863 and Congress ratified this in December 1865. However, the Quaker-run State of Pennsylvania had freed its slaves before 1776, for Adam Smith records this in his *Wealth of Nations*. Smith points out that 'The planting of sugar and tobacco can afford the expense of slave-cultivation. The raising of corn, it seems, in the present times, cannot.' The Quakers of Pennsylvania were corn-growers, and, as Smith sardonically observed, 'the late resolution of the Quakers in Pennsylvania to set at liberty all their Negro slaves, may satisfy us that their number cannot be very great.'<sup>84</sup>

Joseph John Gurney, Opie's mentor, is a good example of an Abolitionist of the time: he felt so strongly about slavery that he refused to take sugar in his tea. Whether his cook below stairs also refrained from using sugar in her baking is not known.

There had been a range of abolitionist writing produced during the later years of the eighteenth century, particularly following the establishment of the Anti-Slavery Committee in 1787. The cause had considerable popularity, indeed, as Anna Laetitia Barbauld wrote in 1792, on the occasion of Wilberforce's bill being rejected in the Lords that year,

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<sup>84</sup> Smith, p.489.

Thy country knows the sin and stands the shame!  
 The preacher, poet, senator, in vain  
 Has rattled in her sight the Negro's chain ....<sup>85</sup>

This poem refers to the same moment in the struggle mentioned by

Wordsworth in *The Prelude*, who wrote

When to my native land  
 (After a whole year's absence) I returned,  
 I found the air yet busy with the stir  
 Of a contention which had been raised up  
 Against the traffickers in Negro blood,  
 An effort which, though baffled, nevertheless  
 Had called back old forgotten principles  
 Dismissed from service, had diffused some truths  
 And more of virtuous feeling through the heart  
 Of the English people.<sup>86</sup>

Abolitionist writing in verse tended to fall into two main categories: the first narrated an incident or incidents in the life of the slave, particularly with regard to the tension between the white man and the teachings of Christianity, his religion. This category includes Ann Yearsley's poem 'On the Inhumanity of the Slave Trade' (1788), which told of the torture and death of the slave Luco at the hands of the white 'Christian' (ll.225, 259, 281);<sup>87</sup> William Blake's 'Little Black Boy' (1789), which emphasises equality in that both Black and White boys will around God's 'golden tent like lambs rejoice';<sup>88</sup> the poem 'The Sorrows of Yamba' published by Hannah More as a Cheap

<sup>85</sup> Anna Laetitia Barbauld, 'Epistle to William Wilberforce, Esq., on the Rejection of the Bill for Abolishing the Slave Trade' in *Poems* (London: 1792), p.5.

<sup>86</sup> William Wordsworth, 'The Thirteen Book Prelude' (1799-1806) book 10, ll.201-210 in *Romanticism: An Anthology* ed. Duncan Wu (London: Blackwell, 1994), pp.284-474

<sup>87</sup> In Wu, p.47.

<sup>88</sup> In Wu, p.57.

Repository broadside circa 1795, but not written by her, in which Yamba's salvation is assured following her baptism by a 'good missionary man' (l.118);<sup>89</sup> Thomas Campbell's 'On Slavery' (1799), which depicts the 'Congo chief' as a noble savage now 'Fainting, bleeding, bound' (l.515);<sup>90</sup> and Opie's own 'The Negro Boy's Tale' (1802). The second category of verse describes the loathing with which the Englishman or woman must view the practice of slavery, such as in the way Barbauld presents the disgust she feels at the Lords' rejection of the 1792 Bill in her poem above, and William Cowper describes twice: first with dark, ironic humour in his poem 'Sweet Meat has Sour Sauce, or the Slave Trader in the Dumps' (1788),<sup>91</sup> then with gravitas in Book II of *The Task*, in which he writes

My ear is pain'd,  
My soul is sick, of ev'ry day's report  
Of wrong and outrage, with which Earth is fill'd.  
There is no flesh in man's obdurate heart,  
It does not feel for man; ...  
He finds his fellow guilty of a skin  
Not coloured like his own; and having pow'r  
T'enforce the wrong, for such a worthy cause  
Dooms and devotes him as lawful prey. (2, ll.5-13)

and later

I would not have a slave to till my ground,  
To carry me, to fan me while I sleep,  
And tremble when I wake, for all the wealth  
That sinews bought and sold have ever earned.  
(ll.27-30)<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> In Wu, p.27.

<sup>90</sup> In Wu, p.639.

<sup>91</sup> In Wu, p.11.

<sup>92</sup> William Cowper, *The Task* (London: for John Sharpe, 1817), p.4.

These examples of this canon of writing emphasise both the salvation available to the Black slave through conversion to Christianity, and the signally unchristian behaviour of the White slavers. The significance of the issue of slavery and the image of the slave as contemporary currency in the 1790s may be seen in Wollstonecraft's theorizing on state education, in which she uses the word 'slaves' to apply to women 'in a political and civil sense'.<sup>93</sup> Extending this theme of menial labour and poverty, with its crucial characteristics of a person being the property of another, thereby having a total lack of power, no exercise of will, a denial of autonomy and a superimposed identity, writers of the 1790s such as George Dyer and William Godwin were attempting to establish connections between the topical issue of overseas slavery with the plight of the English poor. Both Dyer's 'The complaints of the Poor People of England' (1793) and Godwin's 'On Property' have undertones of the egalitarian principles of the Diggers and the Levellers of the previous century, and both condemn the ruling class for propagating this misery.

Given the enormous economic significance of the slave trade, it is not surprising that not all writing on slavery was abolitionist: Laetitia Matilda Hawkins's view of slavery, published in 1793, is that, first, the oppression is justifiable on grounds of inferiority of the Black race: 'The intellect of a negro,' she writes, 'cannot reasonably be expected to show itself as strong or as comprehensive as that of a white

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<sup>93</sup> Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, p.386.

person'.<sup>94</sup> Second, given a paternal, protective attitude by the slave-owner, life would be 'not only easy, but in a short time [this would ensure] that freedom would be no temptation.'<sup>95</sup> This appeal to reasonableness, as distinct from reason, is almost always, as here, a characteristic of reactionary rhetoric. It is a soporific at once soothing and numbing which enables a line of argument to be developed that makes the repulsive seem plausible, and Hawkins is clever at this.

By contrast, Opie's poem is clearly Abolitionist and its tone is didactic. In the first stanza, the reader is urged to action: 'Oh! try to *end* the griefs you hear' (st.1). In the second, the contrast is made between 'the Black man's woes' and 'the White man's crime' (st.4). The Black narrator, after bewailing the hardships he endures, apostrophises 'Ah! No. But Englishmen can work whenever they like, and stop for breath' (st.28) and later, 'Who dares an English peasant flog?' (st.29). Put into the mouth of the Black narrator the comparison is valid enough: however, it does present an interesting aspect of his creator. The relationship between reader and text is disturbed by the writer's evident ignorance of the lives of the English working poor. Opie's verse was published in the same year that Trade Unions were first legalised, and nine years before the transportation of the men known as the Tolpuddle Martyrs. The findings of the Parliamentary Commissioners set up by the Factory Act of 1819 record Elizabeth Bentley's testimony of working, at age six, from six a.m. to seven p.m.

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<sup>94</sup> Laetitia Matilda Hawkins, *Letters on the Female Mind, Its Powers and Pursuits* (London: Hookham & Carpenter, 1793), p.134.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, p.136.



normally, and ‘From 5 in the morning until 9 at night, when they were thronged [i.e., busy], and of the overlooker’s use of his scourge.’<sup>96</sup> If the English peasants and urban poor were only rarely flogged, they certainly suffered disproportionate punishment in other forms for relatively minor misdemeanours. Flogging itself was the preferred punishment for lower-deck breaches of the Articles of War in the Royal Navy, as it was in the Army and the prison system.

Examples from Dyer and Godwin indicate how the middle ranks of English society were becoming more aware of the plight of the poor: in the early nineteenth century this awareness was to grow, as indeed is indicated by the setting-up of the Parliamentary Commissioners and similar reformist measures. Opie herself had treated the subject of poverty in her *Poems* of 1802: ‘Fatherless Fanny’, ‘The Orphan Boy’s Tale’ and ‘The Despairing Wanderer’, for example – yet she seems unable to make any connection between the exploitation of labour overseas and similar exploitation at home.

Opie’s contrast of Black and White simply demonstrates the opacity of her view towards oppression. Even when she describes the Black slave’s food, she is describing fare which would have been considered palatable – if a little strange – by many British workers at a time when food was expensive and often in short supply:

... All our food  
Is rice, dried fish and Indian meal.  
Hard, scanty fare! Oh would I could  
Make White men Negroes’ miseries feel! (st.32)

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<sup>96</sup> In John Carey, ed., *The Faber Book of Reportage* (London: Faber & Faber, 1987), pp.295-298.

The solution to the Black slave's hardship is an articulation of the reactionary values of the religious right, in a rehearsal of the values of salvation that are present in 'The Sorrows of Yamba':

Well must I learn to bear my pain;  
 And lately, I am grown more calm;  
 For Christian men come o'er the main  
 To pour in Negroes' souls a balm.

They tell me if, with patient heart,  
 I bear my wrongs from day to day,  
 I shall at death to realms depart  
 Where God wipes every tear away!  
 (sts. 49 & 50)

This acquiescence in the face of exploitation is in strange contrast to the goal of emancipation, although it certainly makes an acceptable doctrine for the oppressing class, and is in contrast to Opie's exhortations to liberty in such earlier publications as *The Cabinet*. Her attitude is more in keeping with the Dissenting writers of the next generation such as Elizabeth Gaskell, who, in *Mary Barton* (1848), a novel based on an incident during industrial unrest in Manchester in 1831, articulates an anti-union perspective along with imposed virtues of religiosity and self-reliance at a time of hardship when children are dying of starvation.<sup>97</sup>

In common with other nineteenth-century authors such as Gaskell and George Eliot, and in contrast to her youthful revolutionism, Opie was not sympathetic to rank-and-file protest. During the protests against mechanisation in agriculture of 1821 known as the Swing riots, she writes of travelling to London via the

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<sup>97</sup> See Elie Halévy, *The Triumph of Reform* (London: Ernest Benn, 1927), p.16.

‘slowest but safest’ method, ‘the broad wheeled wagon’ – three days from Norwich rather than the usual two – because of the danger of military firing on the rioting population.<sup>98</sup> This, coupled with her fear of going out late at that time indicates the impact the disturbances had on her, yet there is not indication of any awareness on her part of the reasons for them, let alone any mention of sympathy or otherwise.

Agrarian unrest simmered until 1830, when special powers, including the death sentence, were given to local magistrates and in one month over nine hundred arrests were made, particularly in East Anglia.<sup>99</sup>

Opie makes no reference to this. While she writes of the ‘starving population’ of Norwich weavers in 1829, her only remedy is charity.<sup>100</sup> When they began smashing looms in desperation her only reaction is a fear for her own safety.<sup>101</sup> The march of ten thousand skilled workmen on Westminster to demand work on 13 December 1830 passes unremarked, although it must be said she was in Paris on that day, writing to Sarah Rose of the political situation in that city.<sup>102</sup>

Opie prefers distant causes and grand gestures, both of which may attain a patina of romance: she twice mentions ‘poor Poland’ in letters written during the Polish insurrection and its invasion by Russia

<sup>98</sup> Amelia Opie to Eliza Alderson, 31 July 1821; Huntington Library.

<sup>99</sup> See Halevy, 1927, p.15.

<sup>100</sup> Amelia Opie to Mlle du Vauld, 15 December 1829; Friends’ Collection, Swarthmore.

<sup>101</sup> Amelia Opie to Henry Briggs, 19 December 1829; Huntington Library.

<sup>102</sup> Amelia Opie to Sarah Rose, 13 December 1830; Huntington Library.

in 1831.<sup>103</sup> She is delighted to find that during her audience with the Queen of France in 1831, the Queen is knitting footwarmers for the poor – it is this kind of charitable act that seems so worthy to her, rather than, say, the Queen establishing a small factory to produce rather more of these items than she could herself.<sup>104</sup> It is to be seen for the gesture rather than the usefulness, like the ‘Queen’s Scarves’ of the 1914-1918 War.

She begins to see the weakness of reliance on charity as a social remedy when describing further hardships in Norwich in 1841: ‘I cannot give to all,’ she writes, but records in the same letter how the local Chartists were ‘easily dispersed’ by the police.<sup>105</sup> In keeping with the mass of public opinion, Opie did not align herself with revolutionary Radicalism in the 1830s.<sup>106</sup> She describes herself as a Whig lady on three occasions in her letters, although not when writing to Friends.<sup>107</sup> It is quite clear that, in keeping with the times, she aligned herself with the substantial centrist, bourgeois element of English life with a faith in reform and an equal abhorrence of revolution.

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<sup>103</sup> Amelia Opie to Eliza Briggs, 11 February 1831; Amelia Opie to Sarah Rose, 7 March 1831: both Huntington Library.

<sup>104</sup> Amelia Opie to Sarah Rose, 7 March 1831; Huntington Library.

<sup>105</sup> Amelia Opie to Lady Charleville, 8 December 1841; Marlay Collection, University of Nottingham.

<sup>106</sup> See Halevy, p.28.

<sup>107</sup> Amelia Opie to Eliza Briggs, 16 April 1835 and 17 May 1839; both Huntington Library; Amelia Opie to Lady Catherine Boileau, 18 April 1845; Norfolk Record Office.

However, Opie's purpose in 'The Black Man's Lament' is to focus the reader's attention on the singular issue of slavery and the need for its abolition. Since she certainly does not try to persuade us that slavery is reasonable, as Hawkins does, we can see this poem as a mediated view, where the poles of acceptance and abhorrence of slavery are avoided, and a strong appeal is made to the enslaved to accept their lot.

Cowper's poem 'The Negro's Complaint' which shares the same volume, has a more radical ideological underpinning. Also structured as a first-person narrative, it effectively juxtaposes the Black slave and his slave-master, who himself is but a 'slave of gold, whose sordid dealings/ Tarnish all [his] boasted powers' (st.2). The narrator is in no doubt as to the derelict morality of the white man, but also of the commonality of humanity, a theme which Cowper presented earlier in *The Task*: 'Skins may differ,' he says, 'but affection / Dwells in white and black the same' (st.4). Indeed, his climactic appeal may be seen as a cry against any parasitic class by any slave, waged or otherwise, irrespective of skin-colour:

Lolling at your jovial boards,  
Think how many backs have smarted  
For the sweets your cane affords.

Coming from the pen of someone whose name headed the female anti-slavery petition of 1833 and who was to be conspicuously present at the Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840, Opie's verse is a poor thing compared to Cowper's, which is much more tightly focussed.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> See Midgeley, p.80.

The modern-day reader is perhaps put in mind of the well-meaning but hopelessly ignorant Mrs. Jellyby of Dickens' *Bleak House* (1853), with her 'telescopic philanthropy' towards the Africans, 'with a view to the general cultivation of the coffee-berry' at Borrioboola-Gha.<sup>109</sup> Mrs Jellyby was not to know of the disastrous consequences of single-crop plantation farming for the colonised countries, and her daughter Caddy's upbringing is not so different from that of Adeline Mowbray, who also suffered a mother obsessed. With this poem, as with *The Negro Boy's Tale*, which originally appeared in the anthology *Poems* (1802), but which was reprinted between its own boards in 1824 as 'a poem addressed to children', it seems that Opie is attempting to convince her sponsors in the Society of Friends, especially Gurney, that she was wholeheartedly 'convinced'. The doctrine of acceptance, which the Friends would recognise, is in contrast to the revolutionary doctrines of her youth but in keeping with her Whig identity of the Thirties and Forties.

In 1828, Longman published Opie's elegantly-written enquiry into the causes and remedies of malicious gossip, *A Cure for Scandal, or Detraction Displayed*. As with many of her other later works, it also appeared later from a Boston publisher, in this case James Loring, 1839. Following the death of her father in November 1825 – only three months after she had been formally received into membership of the Society of Friends – a sense of loneliness figures in her Preface. It is

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<sup>109</sup> Dickens, Charles, *Bleak House* (London: Bradbury & Evans, 1853), p.58.

evident from her remarks that that neither John Opie nor the still-living Joseph John Gurney could usurp the significance James Alderson held for her, and her fictitious treatments of father-daughter relationships in every major work except *Adeline Mowbray* are pulled into focus when she writes:

I have sometimes turned round, while writing, to ask for counsel and advice [and] I have been painfully reminded that the judicious critic, as well as the tender parent, was removed from me forever.<sup>110</sup>

The fact that Amelia Opie arranged for her father to be buried in the Quaker Burial Ground in Norwich, although he was not a Quaker, in the plot she would later share, indicates the strength of the bond between them.

In *Detraction Displayed*, Opie describes malicious gossip – ‘detraction’ – in religious terms, as a ‘besetting sin’. It is especially shunned by Quakers as it implies passing a judgement on a fellow human being, which is contrary to Quaker conduct.

She adds that in writing the work, she had been ‘influenced by the wish to effect my own reformation as well as that of others’ (p.10). This indicates her prioritising of attention to discourse, and recalls the comments made by Southey, Mitford, Crabb Robinson and others on her discursive style and its mediation with the Friends’ plain speech analysed by Michaelson. She lists detractors as ‘Gossips, Talkers-over, Laughers-at, Banterers, Nicknamers, Stingers, Scorners,

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<sup>110</sup> Amelia Opie, *A Cure for Scandal, or Detraction Displayed* (Boston: James Loring, 1839), preface, unpaginated. Subsequent quotations are from this edition, and page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

Swearers, Eye-inflictors, Mimicks, Caricaturists and Epigrammatists', each holding a power to humiliate or injure (p.75). As will be seen, she is particularly sensitive to detraction against women writers.

Opie attributes 'competition' as the cause of this sin, stating that 'when we are conscious that those with whom we are put in competition ... are more noticed and distinguished than we are ... envy is excited in our hearts, and that envy leads to detraction' (p.11). The theme of competition reappears when she writes 'in a metropolis, competition is general, in a provincial town it becomes particular: as the narrower the field of rivalry, the more pointed is the jealousy' (p.13). 'Competition' is a term more redolent of the values of trade than its synonym 'rivalry'. The offspring of competition and trade is advertising, and she chooses to make this connection when she quotes Dr Johnson's comment on Oliver Goldsmith's constant self-advertisement: 'he is so afraid of being unnoticed that he often talks lest one should forget that he is in the company' (p.30). This is the language of business, and its foregrounding indicates its strength and currency as a metaphor in the early nineteenth century, and further suggests the collusion of business and religion, especially non-Conformist religion.

#### 'The Two Sir Williams' in Opie's *Tales of the Heart*

fictionalised the sticky social conventions of precedence, and it is this issue which Opie takes up in Chapter VI of *Detraction Displayed*. Indeed, one senses that having fictionalised the consequences of acts condemned in conduct books, Opie is now writing her own.



Precedence is an anomaly to Quakers, just as is the use of honorifics, since it arbitrates against the God-given equality of man. Given Opie's experience as a social hostess in more glittering times, she was well qualified to treat the topic, although her treatment is careful to take a suitably Quaker view. She pokes fun at the precedence to be accorded a 'lady of an earl's younger son's wife' (p.49) after pointing out the distinction between 'a lady and a *lady*' (her italics) 'to be honoured ... before the other pretenders, who were simple mistresses, though "honorable" preceded their names' (p.48). Her subtext is of respectability over rank, and this is an articulation of Quaker values in addition to being an echo of Lucy Merle's integrity when compared to the corrupt aristocratic Mrs. Boughton in *Valentine's Eve*. Those most insistent on procedural correctness are they 'whose rights to it are dubious', she says, and presents an alternative to precedence by rank: 'give precedence to the stranger, and to the oldest in the company' (p.67). Her counsel to individuals, strongly based in Quaker ideology, is 'That it would be best to struggle with the desire of precedence as an unchristian feeling. That it would be wisest to endeavour to be indifferent to going first or last' (p.59). Much later she was to corroborate this in a letter to Lady Charleville, saying 'No-one can be more opposed to forms & ceremonies & mummeries as I am'.<sup>111</sup> This view was not to prevent her from writing, probably to Sir John Boileau, with a certain satisfaction following the procession at J. J. Gurney's funeral: 'Thou wast not right in thy supposition that I should

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<sup>111</sup> Amelia Opie to Lady Charleville, 26 June 1849; Marlay Collection, University of

not return in the High Sheriff's carriage – no indeed!’<sup>112</sup> In addition, there are several examples in her correspondence of her requesting a special ticket for an event, notably the annual exhibition at the Royal Academy and the coronation of Queen Victoria.<sup>113</sup> At this point one feels her professions of equality being overcome by her feelings of entitlement. This latter is reinforced by her strictness regarding how she was to be addressed: ‘I am not an old maid, but the widow of a distinguished man,’ she informed Harriet Martineau.<sup>114</sup>

After a disquisition on ‘Religious Competition’, during which she observes that ‘Christian purposes do not always ensure the existence of a Christian spirit’ (p.60), Opie shifts her attention to ‘The Vocabulary of Detraction’, and lists terms which she finds offensive: ‘The fellow, the old fellow, mother such-a-one, old mother such-a-one, the old girl, the old maid’ (p.126). The usage of phrases such as these was evidently as widespread then as it is now, for she writes that ‘I have heard them from the lips of those who would indignantly repel the charge of vulgarity’ (p.127). She refines her argument in terms of ‘Authoresses and Bluestockings’, ‘the most favourite subjects of detraction in the circles in which they move.’ She rejects criticisms of unnaturalness (such as that levelled by Richard Polwhele’s poem of

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Nottingham.

<sup>112</sup> Amelia Opie to Sir John Boileau (?), 24 July 1847; Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.

<sup>113</sup> See, for example: Amelia Opie to Eliza Briggs, 27 March 1832, Huntington Library; Amelia Opie to JJ Gurney, 29 May 1838, Society of Friends’ Library; Amelia Opie to Eliza Briggs, 9 June 1838, Huntington Library.

<sup>114</sup> Amelia Opie to Harriet Martineau (?), 28 February 1842; Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.

1798, 'The Unsex'd Females') with a rebuttal that epitomises Quaker thinking about the use of one's talents: 'If the giver of all good things has bestowed on woman the power of writing, she is justified in exerting it' (ibid.). She is now able to use the authority of nonconformist thinking, which has become a prevalent and accepted ideology, in contrast to earlier times when nonconformism was regarded with suspicion of Jacobin disloyalty by the majority of English people. She extends this by presenting a picture of an authoress, old-style, and comparing it with a contemporary image (p.133). Even in most the progressive circles in London, 'the very highest praise which could be given to a female writer would be "she is really an agreeable woman and I never should have guessed she was an authoress"' (ibid.). The prevailing values were of motherhood and the familial role – hence the reference to 'the common and necessary duties' of womanhood, of which, it was assumed, the 'authoress' was incapable of. This excerpt shows some softening of received view from the angry tones of reaction in the 1790s, but there is still clear unease at the idea of a woman attempting to write professionally forty years later.

Opie counsels two defences against detraction, both from oneself and from others: eschewing worldliness, so that the need to compete is reduced, and 'self-examination', meaning reflection on one's speech and action (p.181 and ff.). In her final chapter, she addresses 'the younger members of the Society of Friends', thus

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leaving no doubt in her readers' minds that she is communicating from an authoritative position within that Society. She reminds them of the Quaker doctrine quoted at Meeting: 'Are Friends preserved in love towards each other, and are they careful to avoid tale-bearing and detraction?' (p.196). Finally she offers four rules: to combat the urge to satirise, 'to which all young people are inclined' (p.197); self-examination (p.198); thinking before we speak (p.202); and 'do unto others as you would that others should do unto you' (p.203).

Opie's non-fiction seems to have benefitted from her writing her fiction first. The style of *Detraction Displayed* is refreshingly spare and almost epigrammatic in places, suggesting a maturity and authoritativeness, in contrast to the fuller, occasionally overblown style of her tales. This again is indicative of Opie using a style somewhere between the sociolect of the Friends and her earlier style. Opie, says Michaelson, 'refused to speak either as a woman or as a Friend', but to mediate between the two.<sup>115</sup> Given the characteristics Michaelson identifies as 'women's speech', i.e. loquaciousness, exaggeration and quantity over depth, it is clear that *Detraction Displayed* is written in a style more in keeping with those of other bluestockings, whose assertive styles of discourse and weighty rather than frivolous topics of conversation were threatening traditional male territory. Opie's style in this work is invested with the 'plainness of speech [which] is indeed the opposite of conventional politeness.'<sup>116</sup> Just as she emphasised her

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<sup>115</sup> Michaelson, p.122.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, p.146.

use of the terms 'lies' and 'lying' in her preface to her earlier publication, Opie scruples over matters of language, as we have seen in her remarks about the vocabulary of detraction and her distinction between a 'lady' and a '*lady*'. *Detraction Displayed* thus represents a mature work which, in many ways, anticipates the plainer writing style of the mid-nineteenth-century.

*Detraction Displayed* was reviewed in *The Monthly Review* as 'very simply, and often very sweetly, written ... that it will not fail to answer in some degree the praiseworthy purpose for which it has been composed'.<sup>117</sup> Brightwell includes a letter from Archdeacon John Wrangham, who had written to her in 1822 praising *Madeleine*.<sup>118</sup> He praised *Detraction Displayed* as 'the conscientious work of a very gifted writer [which] cannot be read without producing, by God's accompanying blessing, excellent effects.'<sup>119</sup>

Opie's shift from sentimental tales to didacticism may be seen as part of the shift to the mechanistic zietgeist that Thomas Carlyle identifies in his essay 'Signs of the Times', published in the same year as *Detraction Displayed*. 'It is the Age of Machinery,' he says, 'in every outward and inward sense of that word'.<sup>120</sup> Not only does Carlyle foreground the impact of industrialisation in Britain at the time, using it as a central metaphor in his essay, he also examines the

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<sup>117</sup> *The Monthly Review*, New Series, 9 (1828), p.280.

<sup>118</sup> Opie replied to his letter on 30 April 1822; Pforzheimer Collection, NYPL.

<sup>119</sup> Brightwell, p.219.

<sup>120</sup> Thomas Carlyle, 'Signs of the Times' in Peter Keating, ed., *The Victorian Prophets* (Fontana: Glasgow, 1981), p.47.

insinuating influence exerted by this mechanisation on human ambitions and expectations. 'To those of us who live in the midst of all this,' he writes, 'it is apt to seem quite natural, and as if it had never been otherwise.' Opie herself records some of these changes in her letters: in 1838 she remarks how the transatlantic vessel *The Great Eastern*, powered by both steam and sail, enabled rapid crossings, 'annihilating time and space'.<sup>121</sup> She wrote equally enthusiastically in 1845 of travelling from Norwich to London by train in only three and a half hours.<sup>122</sup>

Carlyle points out how mechanisation permeates all aspects of life, including those with which Opie is most concerned, religion and education. For the former, Carlyle reminds us that, prior to the mechanical age, the divine spirit 'arose in the mystic deeps of man's soul.... Man's highest attainment was accomplished Dynamically, not Mechanically.' Religious awareness, he says, does not grow by 'institutions, establishments and well-arranged systems of mechanism.'<sup>123</sup> Carlyle does not dismiss the benefits of mechanisation, but points out that they are all external, and do nothing for the soul. Dickens' later satire of a mechanistic education in the *M'Choakumchild* school, where all was fact, is a fictional development of Carlyle's observations. Although writing in a long tradition of prescriptive conduct guides, Opie's writing post-1820 developed this

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<sup>121</sup> Amelia Opie to Henry Briggs, 23 October 1838; Huntington Library.

<sup>122</sup> Amelia Opie to Lady Catherine Boileau, 8 April 1845; Norfolk Record Office, Norwich.

<sup>123</sup> Carlyle, p.57.

mechanistic, prescriptive characteristic: this is evident from her non-fiction and from the simple tales that illustrate her precepts for both adult readers and children, and may be seen best in the instructions to young Quakers in *Detraction Displayed*. The focus she found in her later life was a faith based not on mystic enthusiasm, but regulated observance manifested by costume, speech and demeanour clearly differenced from the world-at-large. She had her own evolutionary reasons for developing in this way, as we have seen. The point of the comparison is to show how, consciously or otherwise, Opie was sensitive to the shifting values of the times through which she had lived. The paradoxes of Quakerism - conspicuity by silence and plainness, frugality in affluence - represent her in later life just as Revolutionist ardour and intellectual brightness represented her in the 1790s. Her youthful blacks and whites have become the greys of her Quaker dress, but this change is no more nor less than the change in her times.

One of the more charming unpublished tales remains in a manuscript dated at North Repps Cottage on 1<sup>st</sup> mo., 20<sup>th</sup> 1829 (20 January).<sup>124</sup> This was the home of Anna Gurney and Sarah Buxton, near Cromer, where Opie stayed from New Years Day to 24 January, 1829.<sup>125</sup> The cottage still exists, and was the site of a school kept by these women for local children. The tale, which covers four sides and

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<sup>124</sup> Ms. PF227, AO14 Pforzheimer Collection, NYPL.

<sup>125</sup> Brightwell, p.220.

is autographed, was originally entitled 'The Birthday', but this has been amended to 'The Blow Forgiven'. It concerns the story of repentance by a young child for a blow to another occasioned by irritability. It is the young child's birthday, and her repentance enables forgiveness, and so the happiness of the birthday celebration is not clouded. The tale signifies first, that Opie was continuing to write fiction, particularly that of a moral and didactic nature, second that this did not cause censure by the Quakers, probably because it foregrounded the Gurneyite concept of repentance.

The two moralistic tales in *Happy Faces, or Benevolence and Selfishness* appear to have been published in 1830 by the London publisher S.O. Beeton. The first, of the same name, concerns Sir Edward Meredith, a wealthy philanthropist who 'liked to see the HAPPY FACES which wealth could sometimes make'.<sup>126</sup> The debt to Sterne for this phrase is amusingly acknowledged (p.6).<sup>127</sup> In typical Opie fashion, Meredith is contrasted with Mr. Ferguson, who is not readily generous. The tale is of the bourgeois world Opie knew: of playing-cards, courtship, rivalries and power games. But if the affluent in the tale are stereotypical, so are the depictions of those in need: 'a poor woman, whose dress bespoke excessive indigence [with] a child of a year old, who seemed in pain [and] a little shoeless girl' (p.121).

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<sup>126</sup> Mrs. Opie, *Happy Faces or Benevolence and Selfishness* (London: S. O. Beeton, undated), p.4. Subsequent quotations are from this edition, and page numbers are included parenthetically in the text.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Uncle Toby in Sterne, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy*.



However, the poor woman, a beneficiary of Meredith's generosity, is able to help him find the man who has eluded him: the moral is thus made implicitly, unusually for Opie, that generous acts may have unanticipated rewards. The second tale in this volume, entitled 'Revenge', is one in which the rectitude of a young woman is tested by her suitor: a theme of literature since Chaucer's knight tested Griselda. As in other Opie tales, the woman's virtue enables her to triumph and make a good marriage thereby.

Opie was not to escape censure from Joseph John Gurney, however, when a collected edition of her works was published in twelve volumes in 1845.<sup>128</sup> Although the matter is not mentioned in Brightwell, MacGregor records Opie's reply to a letter of disapproval from him, in which she stoutly defended her position, and that of novel-readers and writers in general, although she manages a nice conflation between novels and simple moral tales.<sup>129</sup> The letter reads in part:

I never thought, nor do I *now* think that in doing this I have *at all* violated my engagement as a Friend – I promised never to write things of the same sort again, nor have I done so – but though I freely admit that *novel-reading* ... has a tendency to make young persons disinclined to serious and more instructive reading, and is therefore pernicious, I never said, because I never *thought*, that works of fiction were *never to be read* – on the contrary, I believe simple moral tales the very best mode of instructing the young and the poor.... My own books (which Friends never read and know nothing about), are, in my belief, *moral tales*.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Mrs. Opie, *Miscellaneous Tales* (London: 1845-7), 12 vols.

<sup>129</sup> MacGregor, p.121.

<sup>130</sup> Amelia Opie to Joseph John Gurney, 17 November 1845; Friends' Library, London.

She regrets that she has 'given pain to thee by permitting to be done what I felt an act of *justice to myself*.' (ibid.) Gurney's reply is not known.

At heart, Opie felt ignored: 'Of late I feel that both [John Opie] and I are persons so forgotten,' she had told her cousin Margaret Alderson in 1838.<sup>131</sup> Popular taste had moved on from Opie's simple matronising tales: for example, Dickens' *Sketches by Boz*, a collection of his humorous and observant articles published in various periodicals, had been published in one volume in 1836. Also at that time Tennyson was creating his escapist world of mediaeval England in poems such as 'Mariana', 'Morte d'Arthur' and 'Locksley Hall'. The newly-literate lower-middle-class did not wish to be lectured, and if it did, it would go to a Mechanics' Institute. To take an analogy from a century later, the talkies had arrived and the silent films of the Regency writers had become *passé*.

Despite this, her social life seems to have been very full, and the biographies of both Brightwell and MacGregor include with some relish names of her callers and correspondents, which read like a roll-call of Regency talent and *ton*: Robert Southey, George Borrow, Mary Mitford, Letitia Landon (L.E.L.), Lady Cork and, of course, Elizabeth Fry and her brother Joseph John Gurney. The latter had favoured her by mentioning her name in the title of a collection of his letters,

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<sup>131</sup> MacGregor, p.120.

published privately in 1841.<sup>132</sup> (She could not resist writing to a friend ‘addressed to *me!*’<sup>133</sup>) Scrutiny of the Register of Letters appended to this thesis reveals many more correspondents, such as reformist Whigs Russell and Brougham. During the years 1832 to 1846 she conducted a vigorous correspondence with her cousins Eliza Alderson and Henry Briggs, which letters strike the reader as being free of the gloss of religiosity on the one hand and aristocratic name-dropping on the other and reveal domestic entanglements worthy of a popular novel.

During the 1840s, Grove, a new publisher for Opie, published a clutch of her works: *White Lies* and *The Stage Coach and Other Tales* (1845) and *Appearance is Against Her*, a tale in one volume (1847). *The Stage Coach*, dedicated to ‘Dr. Alderson of Norwich’ and with the aim of promoting ‘the moral and religious welfare of mankind’ (title page), was presented in duodecimo but with large type, suggesting a volume intended for children. It carried the tales previously published in *Illustrations of Lying*, but without the analytical commentary. The foregrounding of morality and religion on the reappearance of these tales demonstrates society’s concern for public expressions of moralities of respect which characterise the mid-Victorian period. In this way, the presentation is similar to that of Longman’s reissue of *Adeline Mowbray* in 1844, which presented, as Jeannette Winterson

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<sup>132</sup> J. J. Gurney, *A Journey in North America Described in Familiar Letters to Amelia Opie* (Norwich: 1841).

<sup>133</sup> Amelia Opie to Lady Charleville, 20 October 1841: Marlay Collection, University of Nottingham.

pointed out, as a ‘a moral tale about women who thought they were clever enough to live outside society’.<sup>134</sup> Since Opie’s own views had become more outwardly moral in keeping with the precepts of Gurneyite Quakerism, which emphasise atonement and proseletizing, these republications would seem appropriate, especially when seen in the context of the critical reception afforded by mid-century writers such as Julia Kavanagh. After commenting that ‘she was not much of a thinker’, Kavanagh praises her ‘one gift – a great one, a beautiful one, a woman’s gift ... she knew how to appeal to the heart.’<sup>135</sup> In these terms, this is a comment, and an approving one, on Opie’s morality. Kavanagh’s discussion of *Adeline Mowbray* emphasises the morality of the tale and its instructiveness, talking of ‘sin’ and a ‘lesson’<sup>136</sup> Her comments on Opie’s later work acknowledge the change in the times that I have referred to in this thesis: discussing the inclusion of religious teaching in these works, Kavanagh says that this was ‘significant of a change in the times as well as in Mrs Opie’s own mind’. The religious writings did not please her, however, except when Opie used pathos: ‘It was by pathos that she taught,’ says Kavanagh, ‘as Miss Edgeworth taught by wit and wisdom’ (p.282). The subtext here – that a work of fiction should have a didactic element – supports the view that the mid-century perspective on fiction

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<sup>134</sup> Mrs. Opie, *Adeline Mowbray: the Mother and Daughter*, ed. Jeanette Winterson (London: Pandora, 1986), p.viii.

<sup>135</sup> Kavanagh, 2, p.268.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p.280.

should be, if not improving, then blamelessly moral. Opie's later work may be seen to reflect that view.

Despite periods of ill-health and the death of Gurney in 1847 after a riding accident, she remained indefatigable. In 1848 she attended meetings and visited old friends in London, collected for the victims of the Irish famine and moved to her final abode on Castle Meadow in Norwich. Her sense of fun was still in evidence in 1851, when at age eighty-two, she attended the Great Exhibition, admitted with other wheelchair-users before the doors were open to the general public. On meeting Mary Berry, an acquaintance, she challenged her to a race down the straight aisles of the Crystal Palace.<sup>137</sup> Her last years, although lucid, were ones of physical pain, and both Brightwell (who was present) and MacGregor record her death on 2 December 1853 with some eloquence. She is buried in the Quaker Burial Ground, Norwich, in the same grave as her father. An anonymous handwritten obituary in the Wood Collection at Swarthmore, entitled 'A Portrait of Amelia Opie', after mentioning her worldly life, says that 'she saw at length that her peace consisted in withdrawing from those who denied the atonement ... After great conflict of mind she at length resigned herself to the guidance of the Spirit of truth and found true peace her portion.'<sup>138</sup>




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<sup>137</sup> MacGregor, p.126; Brightwell, p.389.

<sup>138</sup> Wood Collection, Friends' Collection, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, Pa.