

THE SPIRIT OF CLEAVAGE: PEDAGOGY, GENDER, AND REFORM IN  
EARLY NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITISH WOMEN'S FICTION

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## Abstract

By the end of the eighteenth century, women's education had become a topic of serious cultural debate. In my dissertation I examine the ways in which six early nineteenth-century noncanonical British women novelists—Eliza Fenwick, Mary Hays, Amelia Opie, Hannah More, Sydney Owenson, and Mary Brunton—attempt to reconstruct culturally dominant gender representations through their discourse on education, while I measure the possible efficacy of these reformist efforts in light of the political and cultural forces and conditions which demand their suppression or co-option.

My analysis suggests that these writers were accomplished readers of the polemics and politics of their period, creatively appropriating turn-of-the-century intellectual and philosophical debates and constructing an alternative history through their fictions. Far from homogeneous in their responses to the cultural text of their era, these women and their fictions are marked by differences in politics, nationality, class, and religion, yet they all attempt to transform female pedagogical practices and dominant gender constructions through an appeal to balance and reconciliation. For disparate reasons, these novels defy customary, binary constructions of complementary sex-based schooling by revalorizing or rewriting culturally prevalent notions of a properly feminine education in the decorative accomplishments and arguing for women's access to masculine, rational pedagogy in both form and content. Because education plays a pivotal role in the ideological construction of gender, in envisioning a comprehensive alternative mode of female instruction which reconciles the masculine and feminine, these novelists also construct an alternative gender representation for the early nineteenth-century woman, a vision of gender parity which translates into expanded

opportunity, cultural agency, and socio-political significance for British women. In challenging dominant notions of rationality, furthermore, these novelists also rewrite conventional terms of cultural cohesion in an attempt to augment communal benefits and individual happiness.

Such efforts, however, are qualified by the authors' limited concern with reconstructing gender through education for the turn-of-the-century male, as well as by the shift in emphasis in the underlying logic for these educational and gender reforms from a matter of rights to one of religion, a transition which gradually lends to an appropriation of these disruptive efforts by the dominant order. Nevertheless, through their discourse on education these women breach any illusions of social consensus and stability, thereby creating the fissure, the opening, the "spirit of cleavage" in the cultural fabric that remains to disrupt dominant prescriptions throughout the nineteenth century. By choosing education as their point of intervention, these six writers adopt the position of the intellectual, a primary site of opposition that helps clear a space from which to gain the perspective, resistance, and mobility necessary to begin to envision and effect lasting, far-reaching cultural change.

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## Chapter One: The Spirit of Cleavage

But the dominant will never  
completely silence the words of the  
marginal and the less powerful . . .  
Cacophony, though muted, will  
persist.

Carroll Smith-Rosenberg

The last decade of the eighteenth century and the first two decades of the nineteenth witnessed an outpouring of novels by British women writers, the production of a body of material that, to date, remains largely unstudied. In particular, many women, influenced by Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and the Jacobinism of the Godwin circle, turned to education as a specific concern in their domestic fiction. Among these novels which use pedagogy as both theme and method are Eliza Fenwick's *Secresy; or, The Ruin on the Rock* (1795), Mary Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796), Amelia Opie's *Adeline Mowbray or The Mother and Daughter* (1804), Hannah More's *Coelebs in Search of a Wife* (1808), Sydney Owenson's (Lady Morgan's) *Woman: or, Ida of Athens* (1809), and Mary Brunton's *Discipline* (1814). That these women turned with such intensity to a study of education at this particular historical moment warrants critical attention. In an effort to reclaim these works from the relative obscurity to which they have been too habitually relegated and to assess their literary as well as cultural significance, I intend to explore the ways in which early nineteenth-century noncanonical British women novelists attempt to reconstruct culturally dominant gender representations through their discourse on education.

The period during and after the French Revolution but prior to the British Reform Bill of 1832 was volatile in Britain, witnessing serious and unprecedented political, economic, and social unsettlement. At the height of what Raymond Williams terms the “decisive period” of the Industrial Revolution (*Culture and Society* 31), turn-of-the-century Britain was experiencing the trauma of its socio-economic shift from feudalism to capitalism, from an agrarian aristocracy to a developing bourgeoisie dependent on expanding domestic and mercantile trade. The social confusion and conflict caused by this clash of landed and trading capital was exacerbated by a general population expansion and a strong movement toward urbanization. The campaign of parliamentary enclosures, or the legalized seizure of land by the upper classes (Williams, *Country and City* 96-98), created more and more landless, so that people moved to the city in greater numbers only to become the working poor. This economic distress, soon to be aggravated by the high prices caused by the Napoleonic Wars, intersected with political turmoil as Britain entered an intensive phase of its democratization. The explosive revolution in France coming so close on the heels of the American one stimulated fervent political disagreement in Britain. Yet, as is well known, by the turn of the century the wave of English reformist support for the French Revolution turned in large measure into a strongly conservative reaction against all kinds of radical idealism. Such turbulence contributed to a climate of instability in which all aspects of thought and lived experience, including gender and education, were vigorously questioned and defended.

The combination of urbanization and population growth during this period disrupted the eighteenth-century system of education; in fact, in describing this system, Williams suggests that “the first half of the nineteenth century is full of reports showing the utter inadequacy, in part revealed, in part created, by the social and economic transformation” (*Long Revolution* 135). Although pedagogy in general became a topic of concern at this time, women’s education, or more specifically, middle-class women’s “proper” education had been a subject of discussion in print throughout the

eighteenth century (Leranbaum 282). Nevertheless, only in the revolutionary decade and the early years of the nineteenth century did women's education become a central topic in a significant number of domestic novels written by women. Encouraged by a large new middle-class reading public, by rising (if somewhat slowly) literacy rates, by the success of circulating libraries, and by the new system of literary subscription in lieu of patronage, the production of novels was on the increase (Williams, *Long Revolution* 164), and women novelists were prolific, using their fiction to illustrate, assess, and challenge culturally dominant gender representations as constructed through education.

The texts I will explore form not an inclusive list, but rather a representative group of noncanonical novels by women written at what I consider a historical high point in the history of women's fiction. These specific novels I have selected for several reasons. All were published after 1792, when Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* was published, and I will be considering Wollstonecraft's influence on these novels.<sup>1</sup> All were published by 1814, when the publication of Sir Walter Scott's first Waverley novel began to transform the literary scene, initiating a masculinization of the novel as a genre and the appropriation, hence legitimization (Ferris 12), of the novel by male writers. Moreover, all are works of domestic fiction, a literary form which foregrounds women's issues and gender considerations. Most importantly for my purposes, these six novels focus specifically on education as an explicit issue meriting serious consideration.

Further, these six novels form a representative group in that their overt political agendas cross the dominant political spectrum from radical to moderate to conservative affiliations. In her discussion of early women's fiction, Eleanor Ty defines the two criteria by which to gauge a late eighteenth-century writer's political allegiance as his or her response to Burke's patriarchal ideal as well as her or his position on the French Revolution and its ideals (19). To these measures I would add the understanding and representation of sexuality and sex roles. Measured according to such yardsticks, then, these novels extend from the ardent radicalism of Fenwick, Hays, and Owenson,

to the moderation of writers like Opie and Brunton, to the apparently staunch conservatism of More. Such seemingly disparate writers thus provide a sense of the range, commonality, and distinctiveness of concerns explored by women in highly dissimilar personal circumstances.

In terms of the political values and implications of the current critical climate, these novels are also noncanonical; in our own century, they have received little, if any, critical attention. In *Mothers of the Novel*, Dale Spender lists 106 women novelists who wrote 568 novels before Jane Austen's time, explaining that all of these now neglected writers and texts were considered worthy in their day. Significantly, Spender's list of meritorious novels includes the six I intend to study, none of which is currently granted any significant degree of critical attention. Even if the author is not considered obscure, the text is; for example, Hannah More and Sydney Owenson attract criticism for their polemical writings and novels about Irish culture respectively, but *Coelebs* and *Ida* rarely warrant a mention, far less an intensive exploration, in critical discourse. Mary Hays, Amelia Opie, and Mary Brunton are starting to attract a small degree of critical interest in specialized circles, but Eliza Fenwick is still largely ignored. For my investigation of gender, education, and reform in early women's fiction, I want to focus on these and not better known writers, or novels such as Frances Burney's *Camilla or A Picture of Youth*, Maria Edgeworth's *Belinda*, or Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey*, three examples of novels which also emphasize various sorts of education, because these latter novels and novelists have recently enjoyed a significant amount of critical currency. For the moment, I wish to listen to voices rarely heard in order to discover that which the canon excludes.

Why such texts as I will discuss have been excluded from the current literary canon is a matter of debate. Certainly any attempt to define late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century literature as "Romantic" invokes not merely a sense of historical period, but also an aesthetic sense, one that has tended to privilege, more or less completely, six male authors as the pre-eminent Romantic writers and poetry as the standard form of "Romantic high art" (Wilson 2). In their attempt

to account for such canonizing bias, Theresa Kelley and Paula Feldman suggest that many nineteenth-century women's writings actually survived respectably into the twentieth century, but that all works of Romantic sensibility soon lost their value because of the change in literary taste after World War I and the development of a modernist aesthetic (2). They contend further that

when, some decades later, literary critics and the academic world in general began to rediscover and to revive the English Romantics, the male writers seemed to be the only candidates for reCanonization; the women authors of the period and their rich artistic legacy were ignored. It was not a conspiracy or a deliberate silencing, for the Romantics had all been silenced for some time. It was, instead, an absence of sufficient curiosity and advocacy—of the zeal necessary to rehabilitate the name of any forgotten writer, whether male or female—an absence of the political power and energy to break the silence already there. (2-3)

Although the women novelists under consideration in my analysis do not necessarily participate in a "Romantic sensibility," however ill-defined the whole notion of a unitary Romantic aesthetic may be, and whether the intent behind the exclusion is as politically benign as this passage claims, Kelley and Feldman's argument accurately suggests that the exclusion of women's literature from critical discussions of this historical period reflects twentieth-century assumptions and limitations.

To challenge such exclusions, contemporary feminists have moved in specific directions. Lillian Robinson suggests that feminist criticism attempts to offer alternative readings of canonical literature or it endeavours to bring women writers into the canon (214), the latter project often extending into the creation of a female counter-canon (216), or, as she terms it, a "women's literature ghetto" (223). Feminists have not, argues Robinson, done enough to challenge the elite nature and exclusive aesthetics of the existing canon (221). More recently, Gayatri Spivak makes a strikingly similar assessment in her post-colonial and feminist approach to the issue of canonicity. She advocates an attempt "not merely to enlarge the canon with a countercanon but to dethrone canonical *method*: not only in literary criticism but in social production" (*Teaching Machine* 276). By investigating marginalized works of domestic fiction, I intend to approach the canon in a Spivakian manner. Any attempt to place popular literature alongside and thereby treat it as "high art" questions



the boundaries and hierarchies of the literary and the criteria by which canonical distinctions are made and maintained. Unquestionably, women's domestic fiction was a highly successful and popular form of literature in its day.<sup>2</sup> Studying these neglected voices, therefore, serves not only to challenge twentieth-century critical assumptions, but also to expand historical and cultural knowledge.

In fact, by exploring the six novels I have chosen, I hope to help reassess received notions of literary history, feminist activity, and gender construction at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In many ways, these noncanonical women writers concerned with pedagogy appear to reflect in their works the growing cultural and political conservatism of early nineteenth-century Britain; as the writers approach and enter the nineteenth century, they tend increasingly to endorse dominant ideological views of women's severely limited roles in society. However, these writers' representations of gender as a socio-historical construct and set of practices acquired and authorized through education qualify this interpretation by suggesting the persistence within a resurgent patriarchy or masculinism of a subtly progressive reformist agenda. I suggest that as the novels grow more conservative in their overt notions of sexuality and sex roles, a demand for specific reforms remains constant; despite their seemingly contrasting political agendas, these novelists all attempt to alter customary patriarchal gender formations in strikingly similar ways, although to different purposes, through education. I intend, therefore, to examine the particular ways in which each of these noncanonical women writers respond to culturally dominant, idealized notions of gender in order to explore and define the disruptive feminine and to a degree feminist voice that ushers in the nineteenth century in defiance of the historically conservative shift in the early 1800s. More pointedly, I will measure the effectiveness of this subversive voice against the social and political forces and conditions which require its co-option or suppression.

Such an argument relies heavily upon a clear understanding of the category of gender in its

distinction from but relation to sexual difference. In contemporary feminist criticism, *gender* is widely recognized as referring to femininity and masculinity, categories which, in Ina Ferris's succinct words, "connote the codes of propriety that regulate 'natural' sexual difference and construct the social roles of gender" (4). That is, *gender* suggests culturally and historically constructed differences, constructions which reflect and determine what is appropriate for men and women, whereas *sexual difference*, or maleness and femaleness, refers to inherent biological difference. While I do not wish to contest this useful, basic understanding, I turn to Teresa de Lauretis to flesh out its implications and clarify the subtleties of gender as a cultural category and set of social practices.

In her *Technologies of Gender*, de Lauretis reacts against earlier feminist criticism generated in the 1960s and 1970s which perceives gender and sexual difference as coterminous, a conflation which obscures the differences among women as historical beings and traps feminism within the limitations of patriarchal thought (1-2). In her attempt to "deconstruct" this "mutual containment" (2), de Lauretis employs the ideological critiques of Michel Foucault and Louis Althusser. She approaches gender as Foucault approaches sexuality, as a "technology," or a cultural representation constructed by discursive strategies, critical practices, semiotic apparatuses, and institutionalized discourses which permeate daily life (de Lauretis 18), as a product of power relations. Such an investigative stance, in turn, depends upon an Althusserian understanding of the workings of ideology. To Althusser, ideology represents "not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relations of those individuals to the real relations in which they live" (165). These "imaginary relations," or social representations, become accepted and absorbed by an individual as her or his own representation and thus become real for that individual through a process of external signalling Althusser terms "interpellation" (de Lauretis 12). Together, then, Althusser and Foucault help define the relation of the individual to the system in which he or

she lives by highlighting the real implications of construction and representation. Neither theorist, however, reaches beyond the male bias of his argument to consider the implications of gender as an instance of ideology. Nevertheless, de Lauretis relies upon their notions of ideology and power relations to help her define gender and the historically contingent politics and aesthetics it sanctions.

According to de Lauretis, then, “gender constructs a relation between one entity and other entities, which are previously constituted as a class, and the relation is one of belonging; thus, gender assigns to one entity, say an individual, a position within a class” (4). Consequently, gender “represents not an individual but . . . a social relation” (5). In this sense, gender is “a primary instance of ideology” (9) in that it is a construction of imaginary relations which have concrete social and subjective consequences for the individual within her or his socio-historical group. Indeed, gender as a social construction is intimately connected to the real in what de Lauretis terms the “sex-gender system”; although not “natural” in and of themselves, gender constructions are “predicated on the conceptual and rigid (structural) opposition of two biological sexes” (5). This assertion suggests that although not coterminous, gender and sex are inextricably linked because gender representations are constructed under the heterosexual rubric of binary sexual opposition. Thus, although gender relations are what Althusser would term “imaginary,” that is, culturally constructed and politically interested, they are not chaotic or radically unstable; as constructed ideals of behavior and existence based on real relations within a system, gender representations can reproduce themselves in systematic and predictable ways. At the same time, because they are constructed and not immutable, gender representations can also be disturbed. Hence, de Lauretis concludes, “if this feminist critique of gender as ideologico-technological production were to become widespread,” the “trauma of gender” could unsettle the social fabric of white male privilege (21).

Such a conception of gender, de Lauretis asserts, privileges two questions: “how the representation of gender is constructed by the given technology” and “how it becomes absorbed

subjectively by each individual whom that technology addresses” (13). Although I subscribe to de Lauretis’s definition and find these questions to be of immense critical use, I differ from de Lauretis in the application of her theory. In the rest of her text, de Lauretis focuses on the closeness of the connection between gender and sex in order to explore the implications for the body, desire, and subjectivity. In fact, many gender theorists share this fruitful method of critical inquiry. Judith Butler, for example, is an acclaimed gender theorist whose notion of gender is markedly similar to that of de Lauretis; I call on Butler in particular because she shares my concern with “the ontological constructions of identity” (*Gender Trouble* 5). Like de Lauretis, Butler works from the ideas of Foucault in her explorations of the sex-gender distinction in order to concentrate on issues of construction and representation. Her specific argument in *Gender Trouble* claims gender as a performance, suggesting that discourse produces effects through a reiteration that is compelled by regulatory practices formed to ensure gender coherence. Her understanding of gender thus concentrates on the concrete implications of gender constructions as they seek “self-naturalization” (*Gender Trouble* 33).

However, in her attempt to investigate the politically transgressive potential of gender as performance, Butler focuses on how gender helps problematize sex; like de Lauretis, Butler’s analysis primarily concerns the implications of gender for desire and sexuality. Indeed, both *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter* are persuasive in their reconceptualization of the category of sex, an investigation which constructively clarifies de Lauretis’s definition. Rather than “a bodily given on which the construct of gender is artificially imposed,” sex, according to Butler, refers to “a cultural norm which governs the materializations of bodies” (*Bodies* 2-3). Butler’s argument is most effective in disrupting the notion of sex as something natural, passive, outside the social. Her analysis, therefore, leads to many revealing insights concerning the body and desire.

Although an understanding of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century as an

historical period and the particular novels I have chosen to discuss would benefit greatly from more informed explorations of sexuality and desire, I intend to use de Lauretis's theory of gender to a purpose different than those assigned it by either de Lauretis or Butler.<sup>3</sup> In applying the notion of gender as a technology to these novels, I align myself critically more with someone like Mary Poovey in her provocative discussion of Victorian England in *Uneven Developments*. Also concerned with ideology and social representation, Poovey acknowledges the importance of sexuality in its relation to ideology but focuses on how images of gender inform culture; that is, while exploring the instability behind the apparent coherence of ideology, her focus is more on gender's effects on the cultural, intellectual body than on the desiring, sexual body. Similarly, rather than gender's influence on desire and sexuality, I want to explore the broader, idealized, and ideological implications of gender for political action and historical understanding. Concentrating on concrete, historical circumstances, I will examine the interactions of gender images and social institutions, particularly the educational system, and how this intersection determines the individual's intellectual and social, rather than physical or sexual, existence.

This concern with real, historical circumstances and with how images come to signify particular meanings to the culture which forms them points to a difficulty in de Lauretis's and Butler's conceptions of gender. Both theorists clearly form their arguments against essentializing gestures of any kind, yet neither pays enough attention to the specificities of the real world, the particular, the concrete, the determinate forms of material existence.<sup>4</sup> In discussing gender as performativity, Butler tends to represent gender as a cloak or artifice to be put on and taken off at will rather than as an effect of productive constraint (*Bodies x*). She acknowledges the faultiness of this abstraction in her second book but, as already suggested, seeks to overcome it by turning her focus to the sexual body rather than to those constructions of cultural and intellectual inheritance on which I concentrate.

More problematic, if more subtle, is an assumption at the base of de Lauretis's argument. She identifies one of her central mandates as separating "women" from "Woman," or reclaiming "women as historical beings," as unique, diverse individuals (10). Yet her approach, although it attempts to address specificity, is not worldly enough. The key difficulty reveals itself in her notion of agency. She writes,

To assert that the social representation of gender affects its subjective construction and that, vice versa, the subjective representation of gender—or self-representation—affects its social construction, leaves open a possibility of agency and self-determination at the subjective and even individual level of micropolitical and everyday practices which Althusser himself would clearly disclaim. I, nevertheless, will claim that possibility. (9)

De Lauretis contends that gender is the process and product of self-representation as well as representation, and that the social construction of gender and the self-representation of the individual are mutually influencing. I find this assertion particularly significant because the possibility of agency and self-determination allowed for in this notion of self-representation and its implications for the social construct speaks directly to my concern with reformist efforts and abilities in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century women's fiction. The problem is that de Lauretis's notion of agency needs more work in the context of particular historical conditions. Specifically, within his or her particular culture the subaltern, as opposed to a member of the hegemonic group, has severely limited political and economic power. By *subaltern*, I suggest not simply an oppositional voice, for the latter term can apply to factional differences or minority parties struggling against the dominant order, such as a liberal organization in a conservative state. *Subaltern*, rather, refers to those who are fully disenfranchised, excluded, marginal, "other."<sup>5</sup> It is a term used by Antonio Gramsci to define the working classes in fascist Italy and by later writers, such as Spivak, to describe people of color. Because, as I will demonstrate shortly, middle-class women in early nineteenth-century Britain were clearly marginalized members of the dominant order, I employ the term to describe bourgeois women at the beginning of the last century, while in no way claiming that they are the only group

so treated, or that this treatment is as oppressive as that meted out to, say, the black slaves in San Domingo. An approach to gender, then, needs to consider whether the subaltern, through self-representation, can have any real, as opposed to theoretical, effect on the social realm, whether these women novelists as subordinate members of their culture's power structures or relations can have any concrete influence within their specific historical and social situation.

De Lauretis does make a brief attempt to address the issue of the subaltern, asking if "oppositional discourses or counter-practices . . . can become dominant or hegemonic" and whether they in fact need to become dominant "in order for social relations to change" (17), but her response is not satisfactory. In criticizing Wendy Hollway's attempt to reconceptualize power for its inability to perceive a method of effecting much real change (16-17), de Lauretis asserts,

the terms of a different construction of gender also exist, in the margins of hegemonic discourses. Posed from outside the heterosexual social contract, and inscribed in micropolitical practices, these terms can also have a part in the construction of gender, and their effects are rather at the "local" level of resistances, in subjectivity and self-representation. (18)

When focussing on the "margins of hegemonic discourse," de Lauretis correctly affirms the subaltern's agency as resistance at a "local" level of subjectivity and self-representation. However, she presses her analysis no further. She does not consider whether marginalized voices can extend the effects of their agency beyond the local, whether, as her definition of gender implies, their self-representations can affect broader social constructions, whether their efforts at resistance can contribute to any effective, lasting, large-scale transformations, and if so, how.

To make de Lauretis's gender theory more "worldly," her arguments need to be grounded more consistently in the cultural concerns of a theorist like Gayatri Spivak, whose insistence on an awareness of Third World issues helps keep feminism from totalizing assumptions. Spivak augments her post-structural understanding of gender with a concern for cultural specificity, insisting that because women are caught in systems (*Other Worlds* 78), the feminist critic needs to proceed

cautiously at the microscopic level, being careful not to “other” the Third World (*Other Worlds* 150). With Spivak’s caution in mind, I must acknowledge that the efforts at reformation and liberation which I will explore in the fiction of these bourgeois women writers are built on the oppression of not only working-class British women, but also women of color. In most of the novels in my study, the issues of colonialism and slavery emerge tangentially to the main narrative. However, except for Brunton’s *Discipline*, which momentarily foregrounds and examines the rising bourgeoisie’s participation in the process of British imperialism, most of the novels do not explore sufficiently the implications of colonialism for the emancipatory movement of the narrative. Rather, the colonial other remains a recessed site of contestation or mark of limitation in the novels, qualifying the progressiveness of the writers’ reformist agendas. Such imperialist undercurrents are deserving of a more detailed investigation than I am able to offer in the present study. Nevertheless, I find Spivak’s insistence on specificity useful because although I deal almost exclusively with British and not Third World women, the point remains that when women are seen within culturally and historically specific circumstances, the notion of change, and agency as the ability to influence or effect specific change, becomes especially urgent. As an historical construct, culture is unstable, undergoing perpetual transformation, but directing this process rather than reacting to changes beyond one’s control requires specific powers, often of combination and concerted action. From their circumscribed political position, any dissenting group will face a difficult challenge in seeking and securing reform.

Clearly, then, this issue of marginalized voices and the potential for agency is central to my analysis of early women’s fiction. I suggest that each of the novels under investigation seeks to transform gender constructions through a discussion of education. Because gender as a socio-historical category is inherently unstable, the possibility of altering its construction through education is theoretically sound. As de Lauretis argues, self-representation influences social construction and vice versa; therefore, if these women offer alternative gender constructions in their discourse, their



self-representations could in theory have an impact on ideological perceptions and constructions of gender, thereby altering in Althusserian fashion real relations of existence. However, as marginalized, disenfranchised persons, these female writers and their female readers enjoy seemingly little if any political influence in the public world beyond their texts despite the popularity of these novels. As Mary Poovey explains, the eighteenth-century ideology of individualism suggested that social change comes through the efforts of the individual, but “middle-class women were not encouraged to think of themselves as part of this nation of individuals” (*Proper Lady* 27). Consequently, “because they were women they actually had neither the political nor economic power necessary to contribute to social change” (*Proper Lady* 27). Thus, as works of domestic fiction these novels were written by and for women, cultural members of limited political and economic influence. The question becomes, then, whether this subaltern group can envision a method of successfully transforming in any kind of practical, far-reaching, and lasting way the gender constructions privileged by dominant ideologies which require these writers’ subordination, submission, or co-option.

Determining the possible efficacy of attempts to provoke cultural change depends on one’s notion of culture and how it functions. Not insignificantly, the word *culture* in its modern sense came into use, according to Raymond Williams, during the Industrial Revolution (*Culture and Society* vii). Williams explains that “Before this period, it had meant, primarily, the ‘tending of natural growth’, and then, by analogy, a process of human training” (*Culture and Society* xvi). Through the nineteenth century, the term evolved until culture came to mean “not only a body of intellectual and imaginative work . . . but also and essentially a whole way of life” (*Culture and Society* 325). In a more contemporary definition, cultural theorist Edward Said examines culture as “an environment, process, and hegemony in which individuals (in their private circumstances) and their works are embedded, as well as overseen at the top by a superstructure and at the base by a

whole series of methodological attitudes” (*World, Text, Critic* 8). Both Williams’s historical and Said’s theoretical definitions, therefore, focus on culture as a process, as a “way” of life; the means by which this process functions thus determines in part the notion of cultural agency.

As a theorist concerned with representation and construction, Michel Foucault argues that culture functions as a system of power relations. In *Discipline and Punish*, he describes the birth of modern culture as a shift in the form of these power relations. At the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, punishment as a public spectacle disappeared (8); instead of torture, pain, and public execution, punishment began to centre on the loss of authority or rights (15). Under the guise of leniency and humanity, punishment became hidden, addressing the soul rather than the body (16), judging the person and not simply the crime (18). Foucault describes the onset of modern culture, then, as a shift from sovereign power, its will to control visibly evident through the spectacle of public execution, to disciplinary power, invisibly enforcing its mandate through surveillance and coercion (187). He contends that in modern culture, disciplinary power is everywhere all the time; it is inescapable (176), functioning as “a network of relations from top to bottom, but also to a certain extent from bottom to top and laterally” (176), always alert and in silence (177). Disciplinary power seeks to normalize the individual, to ensure conformity, and the best way to achieve this end is to promote internalization of the rules of one’s own subordination, to make each individual self-policing. As Foucault explains, “A stupid despot may constrain his slaves with iron chains; but a true politician binds them even more strongly by the chain of their own ideas” (102-03). Using Bentham’s Panopticon, or the proposed punitive institution which offers optimal, perpetual surveillance, as his metaphor, Foucault asserts that panopticism is part of our culture (223), that modern culture as a construct of disciplinary power is, in fact, a “cellular prison” (227).

As dark as is this vision of culture, Foucault is able to offer a clear account of the power

relations which constrain the individual within the social system, of the process by which the dominant culture perpetuates itself. Yet once again the issue of agency and change presents a difficulty. Foucault challenges traditional views which perceive history as monolithic or homogeneous, defining his project as the recovery of differences. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*, he explains that he is looking for the gaps, the ruptures, the redistributions behind the history of ideas (169). He proposes (and uses in works such as *Discipline and Punish*) a genealogical or archaeological critical method which helps identify the systems of constraint and exclusion forming disciplines (231-32), which questions the traditional unities and totalities masking the regulatory practices and rule-boundedness of discursive formations (23). He seeks to expose the exclusions upon which disciplinary power is based, to highlight that which cultural disciplinary power hides in order to function. In the process, he attempts to redefine the very notion of historical change. He reacts against traditional perceptions of a uniform or global shift between historical periods, suggesting that “The idea of a single break suddenly, at a given moment, dividing all discursive formations, interrupting them in a single moment and reconstituting them in accordance with the same rules—such an idea cannot be sustained” (175). Instead, he views historical rupture as a general transformation of relations wherein not all elements are necessarily altered (173).

However, in his general attempt to envision historical process anew, Foucault does not adequately allow for specific change; he accounts for the possibility of historical overlaps and discontinuities, but he does not acknowledge specific patterns of resistance and disruption or the difficulties involved in historical transformation. That is, like de Lauretis and Butler, he is worldly, but not worldly enough. In a well-argued assessment of both Foucault and Derrida, Edward Said criticizes Foucault’s “passive and sterile” view of power (*World, Text, Critic* 221) as the cause of Foucault’s inability to deal adequately with historical change. Said defines *worldliness* as

“circumstantial reality” (*World, Text, Critic* 34), as being enmeshed in circumstances, time, place, society. According to Said, Foucault defies such worldliness because his “eagerness not to fall into Marxist economism causes him to obliterate the role of classes, the role of economics, the role of insurgency and rebellion in the societies he discusses” (*World, Text, Critic* 244). Indeed, while Foucault explores the uses of power, he does not consider “how and why power is gained, used, and held onto,” or who dominates whom (*World, Text, Critic* 221). This abstract view thus precludes “even a nominal allowance for emergent movements, and none for revolutions, counterhegemony, or historical blocks” (*World, Text, Critic* 246). The result of such oversight, Said argues, is that “Foucault dissolves individual responsibility in the interests not so much of collective responsibility as of institutional will” (*World, Text, Critic* 186). Foucault ignores, in Said’s words, intent, in my words, agency.

I find Foucault’s cultural argument useful, therefore, for its perception of how dominant power relations function to mask their own regularities and perpetuate themselves, but this understanding of culture needs to be opened further. Raymond Williams is useful here. In defining historical process, Williams distinguishes between dominant, residual, and emergent culture (“Base and Superstructure” 45). As culture evolves, Williams suggests that oppositional constructs emerge which are tied to the dominant ideology yet exist as alternatives to dominant values. Because one cannot entirely resist dominant influences, residual effects of the dominant ideology may remain in the oppositional construct. Nevertheless, the notion of emergent cultures allows for revolutions, counterhegemonies, and insurgencies where Foucault’s argument does not. Williams’s perception of culture, therefore, takes into account the problems of historical process. This more accountable view of historical change, in turn, needs to be further augmented with Said’s notion of worldliness; his concern for specificity helps reclaim the individual acting within concrete, socio-historical circumstances. Together, then, Said and Williams allow for specific historical change within a

culture as well as individual agency to effect that transformation.

This discussion brings me back to my main concern, the subaltern and her or his specific relation to cultural agency. Said explains that “the dialectic of self-fortification and self-confirmation by which culture achieves its hegemony over society and the State is based on a constantly practiced differentiation of itself from what it believes to be not itself. And this differentiation is frequently performed by setting the valorized culture over the Other” (*World, Text, Critic* 12). Culture is formulated on the basis of exclusion and differentiation; it depends on the existence of an “other,” the subaltern in his or her subordinated state, for the dominant culture’s own definition, a process which Spivak describes as “an economic principle of identification through separation” (*Teaching Machine* 55). Spivak’s post-structural work on binaries suggests that because the centre relies upon an identifiable margin for that centre’s validation (*Other Worlds* 55), any attempts by the subaltern to effect ongoing, useful change that would disrupt this binary relation tend to be circumscribed by the centre. As an example of this process, Sacvan Bercovitch presents a provocative discussion of the incorporation of dissent in his book, *The Rites of Assent*, and although his exploration deals with American culture, his general assertions prove useful for my analysis. Much like Said and Spivak, Bercovitch argues that every ideology breeds its opposition, that every culture has its own counterculture (364). However, regarding nineteenth-century America, he questions whether the major voices of the radical opposition, Hawthorne and Melville, were really subversive or whether “they were radical in a representative way that *reaffirmed* the culture, rather than undermining it” (365). Bercovitch contends that because American ideological notions of democracy and freedom are predicated on the value of dissent, any protest is redefined as a vehicle of socialization, as an appeal for cohesion that pre-empts oppositional efforts (366). Although Bercovitch’s argument is specific to American ideology,<sup>6</sup> his analysis is an example of how within a culture the marginal not only exists necessarily, but is actually allowed for and co-opted. Indeed, in his more general,

theoretical argument, Said asserts that the dominant culture invites resistance and alterity so that this “other” might be “domesticated for use inside the culture” (*World, Text, Critic* 12). Consequently, because the subaltern’s resistance is allowed for, invited, hence easily incorporated, the ability of the marginal to effect practical, lasting, far-reaching change seems highly improbable.

Nevertheless, the subaltern does indeed have opportunity for effective agency, and one such possibility exists in the intellectual, most importantly for my purposes, the intellectual in her or his relation to education. If a culture allows for an excluded other so that he or she might be domesticated, the marginal person’s dissent is still a site of resistance, however circumscribed, and at this site the intellectual creates the breach, the gap that makes a space for transformation. Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci argues that “All men are intellectuals” but that not all function in society as such (*Selections* 9). He defines the *intellectual* as anyone whose function in society is organizing, directing, educating, or leading others (*Reader* 300); as Said says, “everyone who works in any field connected either with the production or distribution of knowledge is an intellectual in Gramsci’s sense” (*Intellectual* 10). In a discussion of the intellectual’s relation to dominant cultural forces, Gramsci writes,

What can an innovatory class oppose to this formidable complex of trenches and fortifications of the dominant class? The spirit of cleavage, in other words the progressive acquisition of the consciousness of its own historical personality, a spirit of cleavage that must aim at an extension from the protagonist class to the potential allied classes. All this demands complex ideological work, the first condition of which is an exact knowledge of the field that has to be cleared of its human mass element. (*Further Selections* 156)

As a Marxist, Gramsci’s concern is firmly class-based, focussing on how to create working-class intellectuals (*Selections* 25), since he believes that cultural change must start from below (*Reader* 341). But the catalyst of this revolution is not a social class in and of itself; the key to the revolutionary transformation of society is the intellectual (*Reader* 425). Gramsci suggests that the “innovatory class,” or a group of intellectuals, can offer “The spirit of cleavage,” or a critical

consciousness of cultural historicity. An “exact knowledge” of the cultural “field” creates a break in the illusion of consensus and stability that allows room for perspective, resistance, and, most significantly, mobility; Gramsci insists that the resistance created by the subaltern’s critical awareness must and can reach from the intellectual to the dominant culture. Thus, the intellectual of subaltern status creates the fissure necessary to begin effecting lasting, large-scale social transformation.

Concerned more with race than class, Edward Said also privileges the intellectual as the site of agency for the subaltern, but he offers a more practical discussion, at least compared to Gramsci’s later work, of the specific role of the intellectual in society. Said defines the “purpose of the intellectual’s activity” as “advanc[ing] human freedom and knowledge” (*Intellectual* 17), as effecting changes in the moral climate which will promote human rights (*Intellectual* 100). To effect these large-scale cultural transformations, the intellectual, Said argues, must be both confrontational and active. The intellectual should separate from orthodoxy and dogma in order to focus on oppression (*Intellectual* xii), to align with the weak and unrepresented (*Intellectual* 22). She or he must detach from the dominant culture and critical orthodoxies, situating the self as critic between culture and “totalizing forms of critical systems” (*World, Text, Critic* 5). In order to remain contentious while in this position rather than merely contemplative or appreciative (*World, Text, Critic* 224), the “oppositional” or “[i]ronic” critic (*World, Text, Critic* 29) must maintain “a state of constant alertness” (*Intellectual* 23) about herself as well as her culture. Then, with this critical awareness the intellectual must engage passionately in worldly causes (*Intellectual* 109); he or she cannot simply remain passive. Said contends that “the intellectual is supposed to be heard from, and in practice ought to be stirring up debate and if possible controversy” (*Intellectual* 69). The true intellectual is “secular” (*Intellectual* 120), or active in the real world, attempting to make specific concerns relevant in a universal sense, to “universalize the crisis, to give greater human scope to what

a particular race or nation suffered” (*Intellectual* 44). In this manner, the intellectual’s reach will extend beyond the local.

Said’s contention that the active intellectual must exist between culture and system, the latter term referring to critical conventions and orthodoxies associated with traditional scholarship, raises the issue of education in relation to the intellectual. Gramsci asserts the significance of education in forming the intellectual, suggesting that “School is the instrument through which intellectuals of various levels are elaborated” (Selections 10).<sup>7</sup> Thus, he details at great length a program of practical educational reforms which he advises for post-World War I Italy. However, in distinct contrast Williams contends,

To isolate the system of learning and communication, as the key to change, is unrealistic. The common prescription of education, as the key to change, ignores the fact that the form and content of education are affected, and in some cases determined, by the actual systems of decision and maintenance. (*Long Revolution* 119-20)

Indeed, Foucault’s historical analysis suggests that education is a tool or technology of the dominant ideology. According to *Discipline and Punish*, disciplinary power employs hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and their combination in the form of examination to train cultural members, and education makes use of all three instruments (170). Foucault asserts that school is an apparatus of uninterrupted examination, or perpetual comparison, measure, and judgment (186), that the power of the “norm” is established as a principle of coercion in teaching through standardized education (184), and that surveillance “is inscribed at the heart of the practice of teaching” (176). In Foucauldian terms, education is a regulatory practice, a form of disciplinary power.

Education, therefore, can function as both an agent of the state and as a method of resisting hegemony. To define this distinction clearly and highlight the potentially revolutionary relation of education to the intellectual, Gramsci distinguishes between the organic and traditional intellectual, between oppositional, active thinking and passive inculcation. The term *traditional* refers to



“categories of intellectuals already in existence and which seemed indeed to represent an historical continuity uninterrupted even by the most complicated and radical changes in political and social forms” (*Selections* 7). Deriving from past and present class relations (*Selections* 3) and thus resistant to change, the traditional intellectual is a professional, “vulgarised” man of letters, philosopher, or artist (*Selections* 9) who functions on behalf of the dominant social group to promote coercion and consent and reproduce a given social and economic order (*Reader* 300). Italy’s traditional intellectuals, in particular, Gramsci describes as detached from the people, a caste remote from popular life (*Reader* 363), tied to an antiquated world, abstract and narrow (*Reader* 369). In contrast, *organic* intellectuals are not professionals; as the thinking element of a social class, they enjoy a direct attachment to the people, functioning to direct the ideas and aspirations of the class they belong to organically (*Selections* 3). The organic intellectual privileges dynamic, independent, critical thinking, not simple absorption of historical matter, and insists on being actively involved in society, struggling to change minds and social conditions. In the hands of such an organic intellectual, education can have revolutionary power.

Similarly, Said distinguishes between *professional* and *amateur* intellectuals. I find this distinction even more germane to my discussion because, on the one hand, Said explores in more depth the intellectual’s relation to organized education, and on the other, his privileging of individuality makes his argument more generally applicable to early nineteenth-century British culture than Gramsci’s class-based analysis. As the terms suggest, the professional differs from the amateur intellectual in the degree of investment in institutional practices. Said argues that “the professional claims detachment on the basis of a profession and pretends to objectivity, whereas the amateur is moved neither by rewards nor by the fulfillment of an immediate career plan but by a committed engagement with ideas and values in the public sphere” (*Intellectual* 109). Amateur intellectuals undertake critical analysis and activity in quest of truth, while professionals only feign

objectivity to benefit themselves. Consequently, Said contends that professional expertise is institutionally divorced from real connections with power, and that this separation of the intellectual from the world leads, in turn, to violations of human rights (*World, Text, Critic* 2).

This discussion leads Said to question whether intellectuals in relation to any organized educational system, such as the university, can actually be free to confront dominant ideologies and act upon their resistance (*Intellectual* 67). He concludes that yes, the intellectual is able to provoke dissent from within (*Intellectual* 73) because the real threat to the intellectual is not the university, not the educational system, but professionalism (*Intellectual* 74).<sup>8</sup> Said disdains discipleship of any kind or degree, arguing that the intellectual can align with a party or institution but should not be in its service (*Intellectual* 110). While organizational affiliation is often necessary for social activism, the intellectual needs to remain alert to skeptical irony, open to doubt and change in one's convictions and judgements so that he or she can remain an individual, a critic, and not a servant to authority (*Intellectual* 120). Acknowledging the difficulty of being consistent in one's beliefs yet remaining free to change, Said nonetheless asserts that intellectuals must express their beliefs "without hardening into an institution or a kind of automaton acting at the behest of a system or method" (*Intellectual* 121). The amateur intellectual must resist dominant ideologies without creating new orthodoxies.

Radical destabilization is thus key to the intellectual's agency in and beyond the relation to the educational system, and although Said's argument firmly asserts the value of instability, his analysis (like Gramsci's) is limited by his binary thinking, a focus which restricts the possibilities of effectual resistance by the subaltern. At the core of his analysis, Said maintains that "as an intellectual you are the one who can choose between actively representing the truth to the best of your ability and passively allowing a patron or an authority to direct you" (*Intellectual* 121); the intellectual *either* reinforces the dominant discourse *or* resists it so as to speak for the silenced.

Reducing the possibilities of intellectual activity in this dualistic manner inhibits the intellectual from envisioning alternatives which could shatter conventional binaries and implicit hierarchies. To free the intellectual from such constraining oppositions, I turn finally to Gayatri Spivak whose post-structural critical consciousness helps define a potential way for the intellectual to reach beyond the apparent impasse of binary oppositions by privileging not simply instability, but, more importantly, movement. By bringing deconstructive methodology to cultural criticism and to the notion of the intellectual, Spivak articulates a way for the subaltern to escape co-option by dominant ideologies.

Like Said, Spivak promotes “confrontational teaching,” or intellectual activity which questions received disciplinary ideology (*Other Worlds* 117). But whereas Said as an intellectual places himself on the margins between culture and system (*Intellectual* 63-64), a position which fails to shatter the margin-centre, subaltern-dominant binary, Spivak recommends movement between culture and system, a constant motion which displaces the binary itself. More specifically, to grant effective agency to the subaltern as intellectual, Spivak turns to the “reversal-displacement morphology of deconstruction” (*Other Worlds* 84). Working from Derrida’s methodology toward feminist and post-colonial thought, Spivak argues against simple reversal of marginality and centrality since such transposition serves to reassert a dualistic distinction (*Other Worlds* 107). Instead, she suggests that the intellectual must expose the marginality of the centre and the centrality of the margins in order not merely to reverse but, more importantly, to displace any entrenched sense of opposition. Because placement on the margin serves to assure validation for the centre (*Teaching Machine* 55), Spivak argues that “The only way I can hope to suggest how the center itself is marginal is by not remaining outside in the margin and pointing my accusing finger at the center. I might do it rather by implicating myself in that center and sensing what politics make it marginal” (*Other Worlds* 107). To effect her disruptive process of implication, the intellectual must shuttle continually between margin and centre, thereby narrating a displacement of the opposition.

As a result, this sense of constant movement implies that the intellectual belongs fully to neither part of the binary; as a target in motion, the intellectual cannot, therefore, be easily or entirely co-opted. In this manner, Spivak provides a way for the subaltern to resist incorporation, to resist being reduced to the other by which the dominant defines itself. Through movement and displacement, the subaltern intellectual has the potential ability to effect real, worldly disruption, to create far-reaching, lasting change.<sup>9</sup>

It is this type of disturbance and effective agency that late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century women writers as subaltern members of their culture explore in their domestic fiction. Fenwick, Hays, Opie, More, Owenson, and Brunton all write novels which focus explicitly on a serious, sustained, probing investigation of the values, methods, and consequences of Britain's educational system. Because education is at once a regulatory practice helping to sustain a prevailing cultural system and a potentially radical force creating intellectuals to lead the revolution against dominant cultural practices, these women authors strike at the heart of ideological construction. Of course, as women in their specific historical situation, these writers have a particularly problematic relationship to my notion of the intellectual. As I will discuss in chapter two, middle-class women at this time were expected to be non-aggressive, passive creatures divorced from intellectual rigor; consequently, to be an active and confrontational intellectual in the Saidian sense required a significant degree of negotiation. Of course, the use of *intellectual* to denote a person, confrontational or otherwise, did not occur until later in the nineteenth century in English (see OED). Nevertheless, I cast these women writers in the role of the intellectual because they situate themselves against dominant cultural expectations and assumptions in order to criticize conventional educational practices, thereby voicing an appeal for large-scale ideological reforms.

Said suggests that as an intellectual, "you want to speak your piece where it can be heard best" (*Intellectual* 101). All six of these writers thus turn to domestic fiction, an acceptable genre

for women writers and readers. In this chosen form, the educational argument spanning the six novels is highly specific, strikingly similar, and presciently Spivakian. From Fenwick to Brunton, all of the writers react against middle-class women's genteel, culturally "proper" education which seeks to perpetuate prevalent notions of femininity by focussing on marriageability and ornamental accomplishments. Criticizing this conventional education as inadequate and inappropriate, these writers attempt to reconstruct notions of the feminine as they argue for women's access to a more rational, masculine education. They assert the necessity of women's participation in a traditionally male domain while maintaining a feminine, albeit reconstructed, space; that is, they implicate themselves as women in the centre (men's rational education) while retaining their interests on the margins (women's feminine education). Through this movement between margin and centre, their discourse on education seeks to displace dominant ideologies determining pedagogical formations as well as gender constructions, thereby creating the fissure, the spirit of cleavage that allows for the possibility of cultural transformation.

Of course, realization of this revolutionary potential is qualified by specific historical and cultural forces. Although these novelists differ in their representations of and responses to such categories as politics, class, economics, nationality, and religion, the gender reconstructions they seek through educational reform are remarkably similar; each novel attempts to reconstruct the feminine and access the masculine through education in order to achieve some sort of gender equity for women. Through their discourse on education, these writers attempt to increase women's ability, opportunity, and significance and, by disrupting customary notions of rationality, alter the basis of community in an effort to promote individual happiness and social cohesion. However, as these writers try to transform the trivial, restrictive, fashionable education typically granted women at the end of the eighteenth century, from Fenwick to Brunton the impetus behind their arguments begins to shift in emphasis from issues of rights and equality to religion and morality. The quest for a

masculine or rational education becomes subsumed by moral concerns rather than political rights, a conservative transition in focus which helps set the stage for the mutual exclusivity of femininity and masculinity soon to govern Victorian gender representations. As part of my analysis, therefore, I intend to explore the limitations of these writers' reformist efforts both within the text and in terms of broader social realities, to expose and analyze the basis and implications of the pockets of complicity as well as resistance detectable in these pedagogical investigations of gender. In particular, I suggest that one consistent impediment to identifying lasting, effective gender reform in these novels is a lack of concern with reconstructing gender through education for the turn-of-the-century male.

Nevertheless, despite such limitations, the significance of these women writers' reformist efforts, however circumscribed, should not continue to be overlooked any longer. In 1995, Elizabeth Langland radically refigured the critical reception of the Victorian construction of the angel in the house by arguing that middle-class Victorian women were not simply passive victims of the dominant, patriarchal order, as recent analyses have tended to suggest. Instead, Langland suggests that as employers and household managers, middle-class Victorian women served an important economic and political function by helping to consolidate middle-class power (8-9). I suggest that the work of the six writers I am investigating, in their attempts to reconstruct gender formations through educational reform, represent an even earlier tradition of middle-class female agency. In direct defiance of dominant ideological prescriptions, these women writers find an effective means, through their socially-acceptable discourse on education, to disrupt and transform conventional gender representations, thereby envisioning a potentially alternative situation for women within their culture.

In the following chapters, I will engage in a detailed analysis of these novels in order to assess the construction and possible efficacy of such reformist efforts. I will begin by contextualizing

my discussion within historical perceptions of gender and education, examining the dominant ideological understandings of the categories which serve as a basis for the idealized constructions against which these women writers react. I will further situate my argument by investigating the work of Mary Wollstonecraft. As the most radical, most influential, most infamous feminist of her day, Wollstonecraft, I suggest, exerts a significant influence, whether overt or implicit, on late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century women writers, her specific concern with pedagogy preparing the way for the novels that follow. Then, I will turn my attention to the novels themselves. I will approach the fictions chronologically so as to render apparent the historical shift from the strongly radical to staunchly conservative and seemingly moderate political affiliations of these novelists, a development which, I will argue, demands qualification because of the persistent reformist agenda underpinning the novels' pedagogical discussions. Through such analysis, I hope to help clarify received notions of feminist agitation, gender construction, and literary history at the beginning of the nineteenth century, with an eye to assessing the implications such historical arguments hold for contemporary culture.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Inchbald's 1791 *A Simple Story* could add much to my discussion, with its provocative exploration of Miss Milner's education in contrast to Matilda's. However, because I want to assess these novels in relation to Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* (1792), I exclude Inchbald's novel because of its publication date. Even if Inchbald's personal relationship with Wollstonecraft may have rendered the novelist aware of Wollstonecraft's ideas, I want to deal with the influence of the *Vindication* as a written text.

<sup>2</sup> In fact, Spender explains that women's domestic fiction was so successful, "it was not unknown during the eighteenth century for men to masquerade as female authors in the attempt to obtain some of the higher status (and greater chances of publication) which went with being a woman writer" (*Mothers* 118).

<sup>3</sup> I must acknowledge the potentially hierarchical implications informing my exclusionary gesture here in invoking Butler and de Lauretis as the critical "other" by which I define my critical "self." However, I hope to defy hierarchy by affirming the value of this "other" theoretical application and by drawing this distinction to provide necessary landmarks in a sea of feminist criticism.

<sup>4</sup> As already suggested, de Lauretis and Butler both work with Foucauldian paradigms, and in their failure to deal adequately with specific, historical conditions, they repeat a Foucauldian oversight. As will be evident later, Edward Said clearly outlines Foucault's neglect of "worldly" specificities.

<sup>5</sup> I borrow the term *subaltern* from Antonio Gramsci. For Gramsci on the capacities of a "subaltern social group" to contest hegemony see, e.g. *Antonio Gramsci: Selections from Cultural Writings* (163, 181, 294, 299).

<sup>6</sup> Although Bercovitch is dealing with the United States, his analysis is not entirely unrelated to my specific cultural and historical concerns because the American ideology he refers to grew out of the same historical period and similar political impulses as the novels in my investigation. Early American culture was born of similar ideological influences as the revolution in France, and the uprisings in both countries had a significant ideological impact on nineteenth-century Britain.

<sup>7</sup> Gramsci uses the term *elaboration* in a specific sense. Because Said offers such a clear explanation of Gramsci's definition, I rely on his concise interpretation. Said explains that to Gramsci, "to elaborate means to refine, to work out (*e-laborare*) some prior or more powerful idea, to perpetuate a world view" (*World, Text, Critic* 170). At the same time, "Elaboration is the ensemble of patterns making it feasible for society to maintain itself" (*World, Text, Critic* 171). Thus, elaboration is "the central cultural activity" which not only produces, creates, and guides, but also fractures, diffuses, and reproduces (*World, Text, Critic* 171).

<sup>8</sup> For a more critical sense of professional resistance, see Bruce Robbins's *Secular Vocations*.

<sup>9</sup> Although, as I argue earlier, I find de Lauretis's notion of agency limited, it is worth noting that this gender theorist comes to privilege movement as the key to effective resistance in a manner similar to Spivak. De Lauretis writes,



the movement in and out of gender as ideological representation, which I propose characterizes the subject of feminism, is a movement back and forth between the representation of gender (in its male-centered frame of reference) and what that representation leaves out or, more pointedly, makes unrepresentable. It is a movement between the (represented) discursive space of the positions made available by hegemonic discourses and the space-off, the elsewhere, of those discourses: those other spaces both discursive and social that exist, since feminist practices have (re)constructed them, in the margins (or “between the lines,” or “against the grain”) of hegemonic discourses and in the interstices of institutions, in counter-practices and new forms of community. (26)

De Lauretis asserts that movement back and forth across the boundaries of sexual difference will create new spaces in the margins of hegemonic discourse (25) but that the “two kinds of spaces,” the marginal and dominant, exist not in opposition, but rather “coexist concurrently and in contradiction” (26). Thus, in a displacement of binary opposition akin to Spivak, de Lauretis concludes that the condition of feminism is to inhabit both spaces at once, “to live the contradiction” (26).

## Chapter Two: If I Only Had a Brain

But if you happen to have any  
learning, keep it a profound secret,  
especially from the men.

John Gregory, *A Father's Legacy  
to his Daughters* (1774)

At the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, women had a difficult, unsettled, unsettling relationship to the novel, gender, and education. Certainly, women writers were prolific; Dale Spender explains that the majority of eighteenth-century novels were written by women (*Mothers* 4), that what was a “trickle” of novels by female authors at the beginning of the century was by the end a “flood” (*Living by the Pen* 16). But this relationship between women and fiction was not an easy one; it was rather a process of constant mediation, challenge, and accommodation, as with women’s relation to gender. Although under constant negotiation, cultural constructions of gender during this period created highly influential ideals which affected both ideology and women’s lives. Underpinning these constructions were political, economic, and social forces which manipulated representations of masculinity and femininity and attempted to circumscribe resistance in service of the status quo. Such forces, in turn, were at once reinforced and challenged by educational practices. The eighteenth-century interest in women’s education reached a zenith at the end of the century with a surfeit of calls for assessment and reform, a concern reflected in women’s novels. Significantly, these works of fiction were not just about education; they were, in fact, a form of education. For women in particular, identified by contemporaries as the primary fiction-reading

audience, the novel was seen as an important, if potentially dangerous, instrument for educating women toward proper sex roles and acceptable gender constructions. This chapter explores the historical intersections of women's fiction, gender representations, and education at the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century in order to identify the dominant gender constructions and educational practices which these women writers seek to reform.

### **Women's Fiction**

The period 1790-1820 was an especially poignant time in the history of women's fiction. The French Revolution produced a debate about the nature and role of women, a controversy which proved an integral part of the 1790s discussions of organized society (Hall 82-83), and women writers participated significantly in this debate. Eleanor Ty explains that "While women had been writing long before the revolution in France, the reactionary decade of the 1790s brought a sense of public importance and urgency to the works they now produced," largely because the connection Burke drew between the patriarchal home and the strength of the nation politicized heretofore private concerns, such as women's education, female conduct, sexuality, and manners (14). The Revolution thus presented women with a new opportunity to extend their discourse into politics (Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution* 29), and female writers exploited the occasion. In fact, Edward Copeland asserts that "from 1790-1820, there was a more free-wheeling conversation in print among women than at any time before or since" (6). Exploring "the consumer agenda of women's fiction" (1), or how female writers of all ranks addressed women and money in literature (5), Copeland explains that after 1820 the publishing industry began a rapid, market-driven expansion resulting in women's publications becoming more specialized and less responsive to general discussions (6-7). But from 1790-1820 Britain enjoyed a "privileged moment in publishing history for women" because traditional practices had not yet separated from new ones, so that women were able "to talk among

themselves and to weigh women's problems in a market economy" (Copeland 13-14). Although my analysis centres specifically upon the middling ranks since the six novels of my investigation are written by and for the bourgeoisie, while Copeland's argument seeks to embrace women of all ranks, his assessment of the book market proves useful to my discussion in its suggestion that these are "optimum years for listening-in on women's concerns in fiction" (7).

This period of opportunity created by readjustments in the book market was underwritten by a transformation in the reading public. Growth in literacy rates throughout the eighteenth century created a reading audience that expanded from the aristocracy to include the urban professional and middle classes, reading and writing becoming especially popular among bourgeois women (Spender, *Living by the Pen* 27). That is, the literary audience swelled along class as well as gender lines.<sup>1</sup> But the shift in the reading public was not just a matter of numbers; the late eighteenth century also witnessed a significant transformation in the relations between the writer, the reader, and the literary market. Jon Klancher terms this era a "period of intense audience-making" (44) because, he argues, "The English Romantics were the first to become radically uncertain of their readers" (3). Klancher suggests that during the late eighteenth century,

Ideas, signs, and styles had to cross new cultural and social boundaries, and the status consciousness of the eighteenth century was already becoming the class awareness of the nineteenth. No single, unified "reading public" could be addressed in such times . . . This inchoate cultural moment compelled a great many writers to shape the interpretive and ideological frameworks of audiences they would speak to. They carved out new readerships and transformed old ones. (3)

The pre-eighteenth-century reading public was more homogeneous than the early nineteenth-century literary audience (Klancher 18) because the earlier upper-class readers had been bound together by the system of patronage and a common code of classical rhetoric (Klancher 19). However, as the network of public discourse widened into the middling ranks (Klancher 27), reading audiences became subdivided along lines of class and monied interests (Klancher 26). Responding to political, economic, and social upheavals, cultural forces which I will explore in detail shortly, the new

nineteenth-century middle-class reading public demanded new modes of writing to address all literate ranks and degrees (Klancher 19). Such tensions, Klancher concludes, forged new social and textual relations between writers and audiences (4).

In practical terms, these new relations meant a literary system dependent not upon patronage, but rather upon bookclubs, reading societies, periodical reviews, and, most significantly, circulating libraries and subscription lists. For women writers in particular this transformation in the machinery of literary production offered new professional opportunities. Dale Spender explains that under the old system of patronage, “engagement in the world of letters had been primarily an aristocratic pursuit” which excluded women from production (*Living by the Pen* 237). However, with the expansion of the reading public into bourgeois and professional audiences, tradespeople rather than the privileged classes began to support authors financially, and when these publishers and booksellers lacked the money or desire to bolster literary production, writers could turn to subscribers to share in the costs and risks of publication (Spender, *Living by the Pen* 238). This transformation in the modes of literary production and reception allowed new writers, including women, greater access to the professional field of written discourse.

This is not to suggest that women had free reign in the literary market, that they could write without constraint or limitation. On the contrary, early nineteenth-century women writers may have enjoyed a greater literary opportunity than some of their predecessors, but their creative efforts were still severely circumscribed. Within the burgeoning field of literary production, the turn-of-the-century hierarchy of genres and the implicit gendering of those genres both restrained and devalued women’s literary efforts. At a basic level, women still had to contest the notion that publishing removed them from their “natural” place in the domestic realm and situated them in the dangerous, unfeminine public world. In fact, Vivien Jones claims that for the eighteenth-century woman, “to write and publish at all was by definition a transgressive and potentially liberating act, a penetration

of the forbidden public sphere” (*Women in the Eighteenth Century* 12). Hence, one reads an array of conciliatory and apologetic prefaces reaching into the nineteenth century with which these women writers try to diffuse their apparently ambitious and masculine presumptions in publishing their literary creations.

Yet Gary Kelly argues that beyond this prejudice as well as the practical difficulties of having to rely on the protection of a male relation or friend to deal with the male “gatekeepers of the literary institution” (the publishers, agents, critics, editors), the biggest obstacle facing women writers at the end of the eighteenth century was the “gendering of written discourse” (*Women, Writing, and Revolution* 11). Men held sway over the rhetorical, learned, stylized discourses, the noble, scholarly, sublime literary genres which required a formal education (Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution* 10-11). Women, on the other hand, were identified with the novel, and to wander into male generic territory courted condemnation (12). Fiction was thus a culturally acceptable form of feminine expression (Batchelor 368) but one which garnered minimal literary status. Because the novel did not demand a classical education as did the poetic and dramatic genres, it assumed a lower place on the literary hierarchy (Brophy 3) and was not welcomed by the literary establishment (Spender, *Living by the Pen* 27). Pope, in particular, objected to scribbling women whose literary efforts and commercial success, he argued, forced literature’s decline from art to trade, thereby lowering literary standards (Spender, *Living by the Pen* 237-38). Attacked as apolitical, trivial, and without artistic merit (Spender, *Living by the Pen* 27), women’s “romances” allowed female writers access to literary discourse but not critical respect. As a result, women writers at the end of the eighteenth century published in increasing numbers, but their attempts were harshly constrained and underrated.

Even when the novel began to be accepted in critical circles as a legitimate genre, women writers did not benefit directly because this acceptance depended upon appropriation of the novel by men. In her analysis of the literary field at the beginning of the nineteenth century, Ina Ferris

explains that reviewers divided fictional practice into two kinds of novels: female reading, or the worthless, “ordinary novel,” and feminine writing, or “the superior, morally edifying mode of the ‘proper novel’” (35), this latter form entering the ethical but never the literary sphere. With the entrance of Sir Walter Scott into the novelistic arena, reviewers began to contrast present and past literary practices in order to define a male canon as the “highest” form of the novel (Ferris 35). Indeed, while critics figured the novel as a female field, Scott re-figured it under a male sign (Ferris 4) by seizing the authority of history in order to create the hybridized historical novel (Ferris 10). According to Ferris, through such manipulations of gender and genre,

The *Waverley Novels* moved the novel out of the subliterary margins of the culture into the literary hierarchy, and if the genre, arguably, did not achieve full literary status until the high modernism of the early twentieth century, the decisive move from literary outsider to literary insider was initiated by Scott’s series of historical fictions. (1-2)

Beginning with his 1814 *Waverley* and culminating with *Ivanhoe* in 1820 (Ferris 12), Scott accelerated the process of incorporation of the novel into the literary sphere by legitimizing novel writing as a literary activity and validating novel reading as a male practice (Ferris 10). Therefore, while this period embodies a significant moment in the history of literature, the entrance of the novel into the literary sphere represents a dubious achievement for women writers whose efforts would eventually be marginalized out of the canon.

Nevertheless, despite such circumscription and delimiting circumstances, women’s fiction at this time still exerted a vital influence on British society, largely in the form of didacticism. During the eighteenth century, writers like Johnson and Richardson recognized the novel’s potential as an educational medium, this awareness leading to contemporary notions of the dangers novel reading posed to both gender and class.<sup>2</sup> According to Johnson’s theory of pernicious effects, the novel’s realism, as opposed to the romance’s melodrama, served as a “Power of Example” to its readers, and this power to provoke emulation required careful management lest the reader be led into

socially and morally unacceptable activity (Gonda 37). For women in particular who were assumed to be the primary readers of fiction,<sup>3</sup> the novel could have disastrous consequences. Yet, at the same time, fiction could have a significant edifying effect on this female readership, especially since conduct books taught women to find in books examples of how to live. Conduct or courtesy books as popular guides for young women reached the peak of their influence from 1760 to 1820, just as the novel of manners was developing (Fraiman 14). These guidebooks instructed young women readers in the values and ideals of society in order to serve as guides to proper conduct (Poovey, *Proper Lady* 16), as handbooks promoting dominant gender constructions.<sup>4</sup> Women were thus taught from an early age to look for models of behavior and gender representations in literary form.

It follows, then, that the rise in popularity of the domestic novel rendered fiction a significant part of women's education, serving as a potentially important influence on their lives. As I will discuss in detail later in this chapter, women of this period were denied access to a formal education and a public existence. Since women were deprived of direct experience of the world and effective tutoring in the exercise of moral judgement, novels became a welcome means for them to decipher worldly motivations and options (Spender, *Living by the Pen* 19), granting access to a world of ideas and social issues. The woman novelist, therefore, functioned as an educator promoting sex and gender roles to female readers. Because any such literary forays into gender representation were influenced by significant cultural forces, I turn now to an exploration of the political, economic, and social factors informing early nineteenth-century ideologies of gender in order to identify and assess dominant notions of gender construction.

### **Constructions of Gender**

Many cultural factors contributed to late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century conceptions of masculinity and femininity, to the understanding of what gender connoted to the



dominant culture. One of the most significant fields of influence was politics. The years 1790-1820 constituted the revolutionary and post-revolutionary decades, a time of upheaval, protracted war, and radical uncertainty, and the events of the French Revolution and its aftermath exerted a powerful influence on English life and ideology. Because English reactions to the French Revolution tended to be figured in gendered terms, this political turmoil at the turn of the century carried weighty implications for cultural notions of gender contested at the time.

Britain felt the impact of the French Revolution in highly divisive terms. Indeed, Seamus Deane claims that "The Revolution polarized British politics to an unprecedented extent. In a country where party lines had by no means run deep, profound ideological differences suddenly appeared" (4). At opposite poles were the English Jacobins including political theorists like Paine, Holcroft, Godwin, and Wollstonecraft, and the British conservatives, influenced largely by the work of Edmund Burke. The radical wing welcomed the Enlightenment philosophy supposedly at the heart of the Revolution, the belief that reason, not power based on money, age, rank, sex, or physical strength, should decide issues of human affairs and government (Kelly, *English Jacobin Novel* 8). The Jacobins applauded the overthrow of tyranny, oppression, persecution, and division based on anything other than virtue. The conservatives, however, tended increasingly to see the Revolution as mere anarchy, countering Jacobin arguments with a reactionary claim to order, holding hereditary possession and succession as necessary for a stable society, and privileging the Glorious Revolution of 1688 as the proper, peaceful means of approaching liberty.

The paper war that ensued among Britain's intellectuals influenced reaction from the British people, a response which shifted as the Revolutionary promise turned to horror. In the initial phases of the French Revolution, the fall of the Bastille and the creation of a popular government in the form of a National Assembly in 1789, the abolition of feudal privileges and the passing of the *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* in the same year, the establishment of civil and religious liberty in

1790, all of these events charted a steady rise in middle-class English enthusiasm for the Revolution (Kelly, *English Jacobin Novel* 9). However, as the course of the Revolution turned in France, so did the tide of popular English support. The establishment of the French clergy as a branch of state, the execution of Louis XVI and the September Massacres in 1792, the Paris mob, the extremist Jacobin overthrow of the moderate Girondin government in the spring of 1793 as well as the Terror that followed eroded English approval. With the French declaration of war on Austria in 1792 and the subsequent outbreak of war with England in 1793, sympathy with France became “virtual treason” (Kelly, *English Jacobin Novel* 10). Consequently, as the failure of the Girondin revolution made way for the Jacobin Terror and then the decadence of the Directory, the wave of English reformist support for the French Revolution turned into a strongly conservative reaction against all kinds of radical idealism and agitation.

Of most significance to my present investigation, this whole Revolutionary process was figured in critical discourse and cultural reception in specifically gendered terms. Deane suggests that “For more than forty years after the outbreak of the French Revolution, Britain, in order to define its own sense of what it was, had to create in France its opposite” (158). In a quest for nationalism as the basis of self-preservation, England thus cast France with its destructive revolution as the feminine, or rather effeminate, other, the notion of effeminacy connoting a degenerate form of femininity. Vivien Jones explains that the writings of the period “follow[ed] Burke in mobilising an already well-established discourse of national/gender difference: French effeminacy—a decadent inability to maintain appropriate gender distinctions—contrasted with English ‘liberal and manly morals’” (“Femininity, Nationalism and Romanticism” 300). Whether a product of the Regency or a natural characteristic, sexual license, according to Deane, was associated with the French character and was seen to render the French “vulnerable to the infection of dangerous ideas” (54). Both French aristocratic decadence as well as the Revolutionary theory of the philosophes came to connote

sexual immorality and hedonism and a rejection of natural affections and fidelity, a negation of marriage, family, and home (Deane 170). The Revolution thus grew to be represented as the necessary consequence of such infidelity, the culmination of the culture's decay and effeminacy. To save England from a similarly cataclysmic fate in its search for liberty, English patriotism therefore demanded the preservation of fidelity and sexual purity, so that a moral and "manly" loyalty to hearth and home became more characteristic of representations of Britain (Deane 34). This demonization of France through effeminacy and sexuality and the elevation of England as a masculine alternative indelibly linked politics and nationalism with domestic affections and sexual virtue.

However, class considerations further complicate any discussion of the politics of gender in this Revolutionary period. Gary Kelly's analysis of the gendering of the Revolution challenges Deane's somewhat reductive reading. Kelly suggests that various phases of the Revolution were gendered differently. Approaching the Revolution from the perspective of bourgeois ideology, Kelly reads bourgeois values, such as community, harmony, and order, as constructively feminine. He concludes, therefore, that the initial stage of the Revolution as led by the moderate Girondins, the phase that garnered the most popular support in Britain, "was represented as a feminization of politics and the public sphere, stressing the values of egalitarian conjugality and community," while the subsequent Jacobin Revolution was a "brutal remasculinization of politics and public life," a progression which met with little British approval ("Women Novelists" 372). Later, the Napoleonic era represented a further "masculinist denial of the feminized values of social harmony, order, and prosperity" (Kelly, "Women Novelists" 373). From a middle-class perspective, the French Revolution increasingly loses English support as the rebellion grows more masculine and less feminine.

Kelly and Deane, therefore, seem to offer contradictory readings of the politics of gender in the French Revolution. Deane's more generalized approach suggests that according to historical

English discourse, French Revolutionary efforts failed because of basic French effeminacy in contrast to England's masculine character; Kelly's bourgeois concerns lead to a more positive reading of the feminine, suggesting that the Revolution's masculinist turn to violence and terror indicated a destructive loss of feminized bourgeois values. However, these two seemingly oppositional readings actually argue similar points by privileging contrasting elements of a feminine dichotomy. In simplest terms, eighteenth-century constructions of femininity are informed by, among other influences, archetypal notions of woman as Eve and woman as Madonna. Deane's notion of the feminine, or its degenerative form of effeminacy as witnessed in the male character, focuses on woman as Eve, on femininity as lasciviousness, anarchy, sexual excess, and erotic threat in need of repression. Kelly's notion of the feminine depends more on the image of Madonna, the feminine as community, domesticity, innocence, maternity. Together, these two arguments highlight the paradox of eighteenth-century femininity, a cultural ideal which I will expand upon shortly, but, more importantly, they affirm that the British reaction to the French Revolution constructed the feminine as the measure of English stability.

Kelly's assertion that bourgeois ideology represents harmony and community as feminine values recalls Deane's claim that English patriotism turned to hearth and home as protection against revolutionary anarchy. Although Deane asserts that English discourse defined this sense of nationalism as "manly," the invocation of the private sphere implicates women and the feminine in definitions of patriotism. Because, as Vivien Jones explains, English nationalism sought to "maintain national stability through sexual propriety and a traditional division of gender roles," women became the guardians of stability, "national survival depend[ing] on women's special ability to resist corrupting change" ("Femininity, Nationalism and Romanticism" 300). In this manner, the French Revolution hysterically reinforced conventional gender ideology and exaggerated the need for exclusionary gender distinctions on the basis of national development. Indeed, the idealized

image of domestic women remained important to the English national character well into the nineteenth century, helping to legitimize England's sense of moral superiority and imperial ambitions (Poovey, *Uneven Developments* 9). Domestic woman's femininity thus became the touchstone, the measure of national maturity, a cultural construction which would carry significant implications for gender representation throughout the century.

However, this notion of the feminine as a gauge of stability depends implicitly on an ideology of containment. Underpinning constructions of the domestic woman is the perception, as Deane's analysis affirms, of woman as sexual threat; femininity is a sign of national stability only when that threat is controlled and regulated. Consequently, within the patriarchal environment of the early nineteenth century, the feminine serves as an effective yardstick of security only when culture is remasculinized. Such is the case of post-Revolutionary Britain. Gary Kelly explains:

Romantic culture emerged as a remasculinization of culture designed to provide a new basis for the move to the hegemony of the middle classes. . . . Romantic culture disdained sentimentalism while reformulating Sensibility's technologies of the self, domestic ideology, and localism, now more strongly associated with the extra-social domain of Nature, clearly reconstructed as a refuge from Revolution. ("Women Novelists" 373)

In order to render what Kelly previously terms "feminized" bourgeois values acceptable in England, bourgeois ideology had to dissociate itself from the negative implications of femininity caused by the Revolution and its culture of sensibility. Kelly argues, therefore, that the male Romantics appropriated the feminine and reconstructed it in a more palatable form, "reformulating . . . technologies of the self, domestic ideology, and localism" as "Nature." Romantic culture thus privileged a male appropriation of the feminine that contained the political threat associated with femininity. As a result, the politics of gender of the French Revolutionary era culminated in a remasculinization of culture and a foreclosure of the feminine in service of this social order.

As Kelly's class-based analysis suggests, then, the political machinations of the revolutionary period intersected with Britain's socio-economic concerns and conditions. The reactionary emphasis

on home and hearth, the idealization and containment of the feminine within the guise of domesticity in support of a remasculinization of culture, served more than the interests of nationalism, of saving the country from a violent political upheaval similar to the one in France. These gendered cultural transformations also participated significantly in what Kelly defines as “the professional middle-class cultural revolution” (“Revolutionary and Romantic Feminism” 113). As the social order in Britain continued its shift from a feudal system to a new market economy of capitalistic individualism, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century witnessed a rise of the bourgeoisie; the middling ranks asserted themselves in an attempt to challenge aristocratic prerogative while suppressing the working classes. The production and dissemination of this feminine, domestic ideal played a pivotal role in uniting the middle classes and consolidating bourgeois power.

At the turn of the century, Britain was in the midst of a transition from a subsistence to a consumer economy, “from an aristocratic and mercantile capitalist society, where land was still the major source of power, to an industrial capitalist society with a large and influential bourgeoisie” (Hall 79). This rising bourgeoisie, Kelly argues, as led by the professional middle classes sought three key objectives (“Revolutionary and Romantic Feminism” 107-08). First, the bourgeois cultural revolution “was directed against the power and the social practices of the court aristocracy and their associates, particularly the landed” (107-08); second, “it was directed at middle-class emulation of these classes, especially as expressed through increasingly commercialised cultural consumption” (108); third, it was directed against the lower classes, both the “‘pre-modern’, mainly rural ‘folk’” for their domination by upper-class consciousness and “the new urbanised working classes” for their victimization by the moral and intellectual inadequacies of the new, commercialized, urban working-class culture (108). The professional bourgeoisie thus sought to revolutionize the way its culture functioned by shifting the social power structure.

This class project, much like the political manoeuvrings of the time, relied heavily upon

gender posturing. Specifically, to wrest socio-economic power from upper-class control, the British bourgeoisie sought to relocate virtue from the upper to the middle classes through the figure of woman, through the domestic ideal. Mary Poovey suggests,

Instead of being articulated upon inherited class position in the form of noblesse oblige, virtue was increasingly articulated upon gender in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As the liberal discourse of rights and contracts began to dominate representations of social, economic, and political relations, in other words, virtue was depoliticized, moralized, and associated with the domestic sphere, which was being abstracted at the same time—both rhetorically and, to a certain extent, materially—from the so-called public sphere of competition, self-interest, and economic aggression. As superintendents of the domestic sphere, (middle-class) women were represented as protecting and, increasingly, incarnating virtue. (*Uneven Developments* 10)

Through bourgeois influence, measures of human value shifted from birth, title, and status to qualities of mind, morality, and behavior, so that virtue gradually resettled into the private, domestic sphere as constructed by the middle classes. By privatizing or “depoliticizing” virtue, the professional middle classes thus transferred centrality, “or the power to give meaning and value” (Kelly, “Revolutionary and Romantic Feminism” 116), from upper-class to bourgeois spheres of influence. In the process, because of their close association with the domestic, middle-class women became the guardians of virtue and value. In this manner, gender difference and domesticity came to displace generation and genealogy as organizing forces in British society (Armstrong 11). By rewriting the feminine as domestic virtue rather than sexual threat, indulgence, and excess, the rising middle classes countered court culture in the attempt to justify bourgeois superiority.<sup>5</sup>

While this domestic ideal proved vital to the professional middle-class revolution and thus women, as preservers of the ideal, became integral to the ascension of bourgeois interests, the consequences for middle-class life included increasingly separate spheres of activity based on gender and sexual division. As the above passage by Poovey suggests, the construction of the domestic sphere as a refuge of virtue implied, in theory and in fact, its separation from the public world of “competition, self-interest, and economic aggression.” Middle-class men began to represent their

social pre-eminence in terms of domesticity, or their ability to maintain an orderly family, in contrast with “the licentious, spendthrift aristocrat and the promiscuous and improvident working man” (Poovey, *Making a Social Body* 126). That is, bourgeois representations appropriated the value of domesticity to assert a sense of class supremacy. At the same time, however, these constructions implied a division based on gender and sexual distinction; in order for the domestic to protect its reformative virtue it must remain private, isolated from the spheres of activity in the public realm. Consequently, the economic man became distinct from the domestic woman, the masculine from the feminine sphere. With this “increasingly formalized segregation of the sexes” (Poovey, *Making a Social Body* 126), gender rather than kinship came to mark the most important difference among individuals (Armstrong 4). The bourgeois use of women and femininity to relocate virtue from inherited status to inner moral worth may have consolidated the middle classes, but it divided the sexes.

Indeed, the fact that the cultural revolution resulted in the consolidation of social and economic power for middle-class men but not middle-class women created a contradiction that would feed cultural tensions throughout the nineteenth century. Women’s material participation in the advancement of bourgeois political and economic interests tended to be, in Poovey’s words, “translated into a language of morality and affection; their most important work was increasingly represented as the emotional labor motivated (and guaranteed) by maternal instinct” (*Uneven Developments* 10). Judith Newton Lowder, in her assessment of this domestic ideal as it continued into the mid-nineteenth century, argues that this translation, which she terms the “ideology of the woman’s sphere,” served as an attempt to resolve the economic contradiction and maintain women’s subordination (16). Lowder suggests that bourgeois ideology attempted to justify women’s increasing isolation from competitive economic practices by constructing women as the conscience of society whose status and power came in the moral and spiritual influence they exerted over men



and children (19). Such representations trivialized the asymmetry of sexual and political economies within the bourgeois culture; while the domestic ideal proved crucial to the politicization and wealth of the middle classes, women, as representatives of this ideal, found their worldly power severely circumscribed.

Even within the domestic sphere, the woman's supposed area of influence, the actual power granted women was limited because men still dominated the home (Armstrong 18). As already suggested, Burke clearly constructed the family as a microcosm of society, as "the primary social unit" necessary to the continuance of the social order (Gonda 28). Within the home as mirror of the state, the Burkean patriarch thus functioned as the head of the family (Ty xii). But because Burke constructed this familial leader as a specifically "benevolent" patriarch, the ideology of the family at the end of the eighteenth century seemed to suggest a decline in paternal authority. Indeed, influenced by Locke's popular theories on education, the parent-child relationship grew more affectionate and seemingly less authoritative. Locke's educational treatise, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*, which also envisions the family as a model of the state (Kowaleski-Wallace 19), argues that the best way to educate a child is through love, not tyranny. Extending this argument to include the female sex, instead of beating or locking up his daughter a father, as the primary authority figure in the family, should instill through affectionate means a sense of reverence, obedience, and shame in his charge (Gonda 32); pure physical power merely "corrupts" a child and "soon loses its effectiveness" (Kowaleski-Wallace 18). Because such discourse promotes an increase in intimacy and affections between parent and child, certain historians, such as Lawrence Stone, describe this period as witnessing the rise of affective individualism, companionate marriages, and egalitarian families, with a consequent decrease of patriarchal authority (Gonda xv).

However, any supposed decline in paternalistic power at this time is largely illusory. In recent studies, both Caroline Gonda and Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace contend that patriarchal

authority may have undergone a transformation at the end of the eighteenth century, but its power and influence did not wane. Kowaleski-Wallace defines this altered form of familial relations as “new-style patriarchy” which ensured “the preservation of patriarchal prerogative, albeit in a more benevolent guise” by instilling family loyalties, deference, and obedience without any visibly coercive power (17). Instead of overt force, the Lockean paradigm inculcates internalized control (Kowaleski-Wallace 20). As Gonda explains, submission comes through filial love rather than fear so that the daughter learns to carry paternal authority in herself (xvi). In this manner, the arguments of both Gonda and Kowaleski-Wallace apply a Foucauldian logic of state operations to familial constructs. As Foucault suggests in his analysis of the eighteenth-century transition to disciplinary power, a social force can best maintain control by convincing individuals to internalize the conditions of their own subordination (*Discipline and Punish* 102-03). By ensuring obedience through cooperation and love, affective individualism created the illusion of increased freedom within the family as model of the state when, in reality, the ideology of the family functioned as a subtle but powerful means of effecting submission to patriarchal and politically reactionary dictates. Despite their position as the moral guardians of private virtue, therefore, women assumed a practically subordinate stance to the patriarch in the home.

From the largest levels of political and social organization to the smallest intricacies of family life, then, the ideology of domesticity contained femininity in the service of bourgeois patriarchy. However, while this domestic ideal sustained middle-class male superiority through stringently limiting women’s activity and opportunity, women were not merely passive victims in the historical process. Women’s existence may have been limited ideologically to a domestic life devoid of legitimate power, yet concrete historical circumstances suggest that late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century women made their presence felt in significant, worldly ways nonetheless. Lawrence Klein challenges current critical assumptions which divide the eighteenth century into

binary spheres, suggesting that defining *private* and *public* as “home” and “not home” misrepresents history (99). Exploring the multiple eighteenth-century meanings of public and private, Klein argues that “women had extensive public lives” (100), that they were found in all sorts of places that scholars currently consider to be public. Although Klein suggests that the separate spheres became more solidified in the nineteenth century (105), his basic resistance to critical binary thinking supports recent interpretations of women’s political and economic significance despite their domestic existence. Edward Copeland’s analysis, for example, explains that late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century women’s responsibilities in running the household implicated them in the market economy (4). Elizabeth Langland reaches even further into the nineteenth century to suggest that the middle-class Victorian “angel in the house” was actually a manager of money and servants, hence of economic and class relations (8), and as such served as a prototype for the New Woman (23). Such discoveries suggest that middle-class women may have indeed been down, but they were not out. Their worldly activity was circumscribed by the roles of wife, mother, and keeper of the house, but they were not merely pawns in a patriarchal process. They participated, at least to some degree, in the political-economic climate that reflected and created late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century dominant gender constructions.

All of these social and political influences, then, plus others such as religion, which I will discuss in the chapter on Hannah More (Poovey identifies the significance of the Puritan idealization of female nature in promoting domesticity, an idealization which was “facilitated by the rapid spread of Evangelicalism” in the late eighteenth century [*Proper Lady* 7-8]), combined to create a cultural climate out of which grew dominant notions of femininity and masculinity, cultural ideals which translated into expectations for personality and behavior. At the base of this ideology of gender by the end of the century was a strong call for stricter and more mutually exclusive definitions of masculinity and femininity. As already demonstrated, the political and cultural revolutions depended

on the idealization of domesticity to support a growing sense of nationalism as well as bourgeois ascendancy, an emphasis which placed men in the competitive business world and women in the home to function as spiritual redeemers whose virtue rendered aggressive capitalism palatable. But as I also suggest, these worlds, while ideologically separate, were practically permeable. Whereas in pre-eighteenth-century culture women generally left the home only to sell goods at market and attend church (Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility* 37), late eighteenth-century middle-class women as consumers of leisure in the new market economy “enter[ed] public space for pleasure,” to shop and purchase with minimal male supervision (Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility* xxvii). At the same time, the value placed on domesticity attracted men to the home after work instead of the tavern (Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility* xxvi), public leisure growing increasingly associated with libertinism and immorality (Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility* 37). Such leisure activity thus exposed the vulnerability of the separate spheres, and the consequent anxiety caused by this penetrability articulated the need for firmer, more exclusionary definitions of gender differences to reify the cultural revolution and provide a necessary foothold and haven for men in a time of instability.

This call for stricter gender differentiation received support and justification from the eighteenth-century medical model of reproductive difference. Thomas Laqueur explains that scientific discoveries led the eighteenth century to witness the transformation from a one-sex to a two-sex model of biological difference; rather than being figured as an aberrant or inferior male, the female body became recognized as biologically distinct, defined by nature and not behavior, different from man in kind, not degree (5-6). This discovery of formal sexual difference initiated the identification of femininity with women’s unique sexuality; that is, sexual difference became the basis of gender difference. More specifically, because ovulation was discovered to be involuntary, “women’s affective participation in sexual intercourse,” or female pleasure, grew to be considered

irrelevant to reproduction, or at least subordinate to “what rapidly came to be considered woman’s definitive characteristic—maternal instinct” (Poovey, *Uneven Developments* 7). Based on the medical model of reproductive difference, the cornerstone of femininity as determined by woman’s reproductive capacity became womanly feeling, maternal love.

Dominant ideologies of femininity, therefore, spiralled outward from this definition of the feminine as maternal instinct. Innate femininity as represented in conduct literature, for example, as well as women’s letters, diaries, and journals came to connote morality and feeling.<sup>6</sup> Feminine virtue implied innocence, obedience, prudence, affability, courtesy, and modesty. The properly feminine woman was to avoid idleness and curiosity, to practice self-sacrifice and tenderness, leaving self-interest, aggression, and ambition to men. Self-effacement was thus key to respectable femininity since self-assertion or boldness of any kind was strictly unladylike (Poovey, *Proper Lady* xv). While the ideal husband was to bring reason, strength, stability, and subsistence to the marriage (Brophy 195), the properly feminine wife offered piety, humility, compassion, temperance, beauty, and gentleness; she practiced patience, compliance, and forbearance, behaving generously with no hint of pride or vanity. Dominant notions of femininity thus expanded maternal instinct to define a whole range of characteristics and behaviors determining cultural expectations of female existence.

Of course, integral to this idealized construction of femininity was the demand for chastity. Because women’s reproductive capacity rendered them the means of transferring men’s property (Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution* 5), fidelity was paramount in the patriarchal bourgeoisie’s feminine ideal. Such emphasis, as a result, clearly defined the sexual anxiety at the root of the domestic construct. Mary Poovey explains, “conceptualizing women’s reproductive capacity as *the* basis of femininity inevitably (if inadvertently) foregrounded women’s sexuality alongside their moralized maternal nature” (*Uneven Developments* 11). Constructing women’s emotional responsiveness as the core of their feminine nature invited ambivalence because that very sensibility,

in Poovey's words, "could rapidly degenerate into sexual appetite" (*Proper Lady* 18). Because female fidelity was so important to bourgeois capitalism and "Given the voraciousness that female desire was assumed to have," Poovey argues that "the surest safeguard against overindulgence was not to allow or admit to appetites of any kind (*Proper Lady* 21). Indeed, proper femininity came to mean demure reticence, passive affection, and an absence of "warm desires" (Brophy 126); a woman had to wait to be chosen in courtship (113) since activity of any kind aroused suspicion. Feminine virtue thus implied and necessitated repression and control of female sexuality.<sup>7</sup>

As Poovey so aptly demonstrates, then, the domestic ideal was constructed on a contradiction, a paradox which she productively exploits in both *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer* and *Uneven Developments* in order to expose "the limits of ideological certainty" (*Uneven Developments* 12). My point remains, however, that this cultural construct of idealized femininity, however problematic, persisted through the end of the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth (albeit in transmuted forms, such as the angel in the house or the cult of true womanhood) to create influential cultural expectations of personal activity and character.

Masculinity, in its turn, became increasingly constructed against both this feminine image as well as notions of effeminacy. Throughout the eighteenth century as women and femininity became more closely associated with feeling and sensibility, men and masculinity became more distanced from any sense of extreme or heightened emotion. Earlier in the eighteenth century the sentimental man had developed through the culture of sensibility into the "Man of Feeling," the fully feminized hero of sentimental fiction who, according to Michael McKeon, "reclaimed a now recognizably *feminine* model of virtue as a distinctively male possession" (314). However, the sensitive and sensible Man of Feeling was short-lived; by the end of the century he had lost his cultural currency partially because the two-sex model of sexual difference lent scientific credence to the political and cultural fear of effeminacy.<sup>8</sup> In his analysis of the development of the modern

patriarchal system of difference, McKeon explains via Foucault that the medical model of biological distinction redefined *sodomy*, or a behavioral potential in all sinful human nature, as *homosexuality*, meaning a category of persons (307-08). McKeon claims,

The discrimination of the sodomite as a different sort of person, rather than as a person temporarily engaged in a detested activity, had inevitable implications for modern gender roles. Under the old regime, sodomy was condemned as an evil behavior indulged by a variety of men. Under the new regime, sodomy was condemned as coextensive with an evil mode of being, incompatible with masculine identity. (308)

Because sodomy became increasingly associated with both the aristocracy and degenerate effeminacy, any characteristic or mode of being that hinted of effeminacy grew to be entirely unacceptable for the masculine character. Political and cultural evolution thus demanded a secure definition of masculinity clearly differentiated from effeminacy and femininity.

The source of this new masculine ideal, however, the bourgeois economic man, had particular fears of his own effeminacy. Supplanting the upper classes meant dissociation from not only aristocratic degeneracy, but also previous definitions of manhood which were “traditionally bound up with classical and warrior ideals” (Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility* 104). Far from the “manly” battlefield of the soldier or warrior, the speculative economic man expressed himself in commerce, pursuing his passions, desiring material goods, letting loose his appetites as a consumer, all practices associated with negative femininity or luxurious effeminacy (Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility* 104). Establishing a new, firm masculine ideal thus necessitated dissociating the economic man from the feminized “fantasy, passion, and hysteria” implicated in the marketplace (McKeon 314). As a result, late eighteenth-century constructions of masculinity gradually established the “public virtue” of the economic man to complement the “private domestic virtue” of the late eighteenth-century woman (McKeon 314). Dominant constructions of masculinity came to privilege aggression, competition, self-interest, and ambition as “natural” masculine traits. The respectable masculine man exuded strength, dominance, assertiveness, and worldly experience,

excelling through curiosity and intellectual achievement. In this manner, late eighteenth-century men as much as women felt the ideological influence of idealized gender constructions.

As complicated and expansive as is this gender ideology, then, one of its key differentiations clearly concerns the gendering of intellect and emotion, a distinction which holds significant implications for early nineteenth-century pedagogy and educational practices. Certainly, since classical antiquity history has tended to gender reason as masculine, associating it with culture and professional men, equating intellect with the divine in human nature; as a result, women and the labouring classes, associated with passion and the body rather than the mind, have been excluded from an association with reason (Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution* 6). This historical bias gained new life in the eighteenth century through Rousseau's Enlightenment assessment of Man as rational and Woman as emotional, a dualistic distinction which the Romantics translated into the nineteenth century (Kirkham xiii). As abstract reasoning and independent critical thought gained masculine identification, "aesthetic appreciation of concrete particulars and imaginative excursions was considered feminine" (Poovey, *Making a Social Body* 133), at least until the male Romantics appropriated such feminine epistemology.

For a properly feminine woman, therefore, intellect was considered "unnatural" and "undesirable" because rationality was coded masculine (Brophy 13). In fact, because women were supposedly ruled by passion, lacking "true" reason and restraint, learning was considered "impossible for most women" (Brophy 33). Yet the discourse of the time often belies such disparaging assessment of women's intellectual (in)abilities. Just prior to the Revolutionary period, John Gregory offers the following advice to his "daughters" in his influential conduct book:

Be even cautious in displaying your good sense. It will be thought you assume a superiority over the rest of the company.—But if you happen to have any learning, keep it a profound secret, especially from the men, who generally look with a jealous and malignant eye on a woman of great parts, and a cultivated understanding.

A man of real genius and candour is far superior to this meanness. But such a one



will seldom fall in your way; and if by accident he should, do not be anxious to shew the full extent of your knowledge. (46)

Gregory's suggestion that young women keep their learning "secret" and hide "the full extent of [their] knowledge" implies a recognition of women's intellectual capacities, yet such backhanded acknowledgement of women's rational potential does nothing to revalue female intelligence. In general, to be strong-minded was to be masculine; thus, intellectual women provoked hostility (Brophy 35).<sup>9</sup> As I will discuss in the next section, this gendering of rational capacity significantly influenced what and how early nineteenth-century men and women were taught, and, as a result, informed women's written responses to contemporary educational practices.

By the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, therefore, gender and sex had become so closely associated, so conflated as to be practically synonymous. The feminine, domestic ideal became increasingly naturalized, "feminine" social behavior growing indistinguishable from natural "female" activity and expectation. This equation of female and feminine, male and masculine grew even more deeply entrenched in British cultural ideology until the binary model of difference based on sex became the norm for Victorian society (Poovey, *Uneven Developments* 6). The early nineteenth century thus participated in the beginnings of a mutually exclusive sex-gender system, a rigid opposition of masculine men and feminine women which would gain currency as the century progressed. It is this very mutual exclusivity of gender and sexual categories, especially in relation to rational and intellectual capacities, that the six women writers in my study attempt to rewrite by challenging conventional educational practices.

## **Education**

Education provides a means of transmitting, among other epistemologies, gender ideology, but it also affords a potential site for contestation of dominant gender constructions. The late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, in particular, was a time of pedagogic possibility because

that period was dominated by widespread calls for educational reform. Education had been a growing concern throughout the eighteenth century. Challenging previous Calvinistic beliefs in the sinfulness and irrationality of children, Locke and Rousseau privileged the natural innocence of the young, acknowledging environment as a key factor in realizing the child's inherent potential for rational thought and civilized behavior (Porter 266). This new Enlightenment view of human nature, the emphasis on nurture over nature, led to a "new confidence in the malleability of society and the power of education," a belief that personality could be formed and society could be transformed through education (Browne 114). Thus, new eighteenth-century theories of social change, new ways of thinking about human nature and society, rendered education of increasing cultural and personal importance.

This concern with pedagogy was greatest at the height of the bourgeois revolution; indeed, Alan Richardson claims that "Education was one of the most hotly contested and frequently discussed topics of what is often called the Romantic age" (2). During this period, significant changes in population, demographics, and social organization instigated general, though not unopposed, calls for educational reform. More specifically, industrialization, the expansion of the middle classes, and an increasing consciousness of the working classes exposed the limitations of Britain's current educational system. In her analysis of fictional representations of nineteenth-century educational practices, Susan Rubinow Gorsky suggests that "Ultimately, new job opportunities and demands led many middle-class characters to acknowledge (and bemoan) the inadequacy of a traditional genteel education" (88). Because Britain's evolving market economy created new jobs with new requirements while re-organizing social structures and inter-personal situations, traditional forms of education no longer suited the needs of an increasingly industrialized and bourgeois society. Educational reform thus became a matter of social necessity.

Of course, reform does not necessarily imply radicalism; in some ways, these calls for change

served merely to fortify the status quo. Many of these late eighteenth-century educational arguments were class and gender based; that is, they focussed largely, albeit not exclusively, on the working classes and women. Nancy Armstrong contends that while cultural notions suggested educating the poor could prove dangerous since knowledge might provoke rebellion, such education could also help produce more tractable workers, not by indoctrinating values and practices, but by filling up their leisure time (17). As I will explain shortly, educating women also provoked fears, especially in the case of bourgeois women whose domesticity and social function derived from a denial of intellectual development; reformers thus had to demonstrate how educational reform could benefit the feminine ideal of domesticity. Nevertheless, whether the result of conservative or liberal impulses, this reformist agitation set in motion significant changes in educational organization and practice, transformations which would continue throughout the nineteenth century.

Reformers were reacting, therefore, against contemporary pedagogical methods and the late eighteenth-century educational system. At the turn of the century this system granted boys and girls a similar education in their youngest years, but soon after infancy their experiences diverged in strikingly different, even diametrically opposed, directions. In British society, boys and girls received “identical care” until age five (Gorsky 93). Although children of the middling and upper ranks sometimes joined children of workers in infant schools or private preschools, for the most part middle- and upper-class boys as well as girls accepted their earliest education at home from their mothers (Gorsky 92).<sup>10</sup> After infancy, however, when formal education began boys left their governess to go away to school or they graduated to tutors in order to prepare for university; girls, on the other hand, stayed with the same nursery governess, studied casually with their parents, or briefly attended finishing school to polish their genteel accomplishments (Gorsky 93). Significantly, while both sexes experienced differing educations according to their social class, from the highest to the lowest levels of society, “boys’ educational opportunities outstripped girls’” (Gorsky 84).

More specifically, male education at the turn of the century, although not yet standardized, was increasingly determined by class. The laboring poor received only rudimentary home instruction, being excluded from higher education except in the form of a “moral rescue” as offered by the Evangelical-based charity schools and Sunday schools (Williams, *Long Revolution* 136). The lower middle-class male generally received no more than a poor, grammar school education from a lone teacher (perhaps with many assistants) until the boy apprenticed at age thirteen or fourteen (Gorsky 94). The professional middle classes, on the other hand—the sons of military, clergy, business, or professional men—attended superior day schools or boarding schools where they could receive a classical education or, especially as the nineteenth century wore on, a more practical education for careers in commerce and industry (Gorsky 94). Liberal families, however, who distrusted the public school system sometimes turned to private tutors, and nonconformist sons of trade and business classes tended to be sent to dissenting academies (Porter 163). Finally, gentry and aristocratic boys, like the professional bourgeoisie, were sent to great boarding schools and day schools like Eton or Rugby where the future leaders and British gentlemen received a classical education in preparation for Oxford or Cambridge University, this education often culminating in a European Grand Tour (Gorsky 94).

Of key interest in this educational system is the notion of a “classical education” because, developing out of an eighteenth-century tradition, this educational construct helps define the cultural understanding of and expectations for an appropriate male education at the turn of the century. Especially in the early years of the nineteenth century before agitation for professional training began to change pedagogic dynamics dramatically, men of the upper classes and professional bourgeoisie received a classical education specific in both its content and methodology. The curriculum centred on academic areas such as philosophy, divinity, Latin, Greek, higher mathematics, abstruse sciences, and history (Leranbaum 284). In recent discussions of the gendered educational practices of this

period, Miriam Leranbaum defines these subjects as “masculine” studies (284) whereas Vivien Jones calls them “male” subjects (*Women in the Eighteenth Century* 100). Although seemingly contrasting from a modern perspective, both definitions have merit because of the late eighteenth-century conflation of gender and sex; because of the mutual exclusivity of the sex-gender system in this period, male education was considered naturally and necessarily masculine. I prefer the word *masculine*, however, as more accurate for my twentieth-century attempt to disentangle gender from sex. Such “masculine” subjects, then, constituted a substantial, solid, and challenging education which served to develop a man’s intellect and reasoning abilities. The male student was encouraged to approach these subjects with seriousness and rigor, intense and deep scrutiny, disciplined and regulated rationality. In short, a masculine education meant a rational education, intellectually stimulating in its form and content.

In the following years and continuing throughout the nineteenth century, this male educational system was to undergo drastic changes in quantity of schooling as well as quality. The nineteenth century saw a virtual explosion in the number of students attending some kind of school, especially elementary (Gorsky 84-85). The Sunday school movement, which offered basic instruction to working-class children and adults, served as a beginning of mass education so that formal schooling became less and less confined to the elite (Richardson 44). By 1870, with the passing of the Education Act this pedagogic expansion evolved into a national system of elementary education, a network of clearly supervised schools in which universal elementary instruction soon became compulsory and standardized (Williams, *Long Revolution* 136). The British government had in fact been experimenting with a national school system in Ireland since 1831, and although there was much controversy between church and state regarding control of schooling, the 1868-70 Royal (Powis) Commission of Inquiry into Primary Education in Ireland helped lead to the Education Act (Coolahan 3-8). Scotland followed two years later (1872) with its own state action, implementing

a national system of elementary schooling which embraced traditional burgh schools, with their exclusively classical curriculum, as well as parish schools (Hunter 3-10).

This increase in educational opportunity met with a significant transformation in the kind of education being promoted nationally. Educational reform being largely a middle-class initiative, the standard curriculum gradually evolved from a purely classical education to include more professional training (Porter 160). With the Public Schools Act of 1868, secondary education was reorganized along a still narrow class basis but with a new, pragmatic curriculum (Williams, *Long Revolution* 136); indeed, even the two principal English universities, Oxford and Cambridge, although slow to change, gradually added new sciences and modern languages for their increasingly middle-class constituency (Gorsky 94). The Revised Code of 1862 adopted a system of minimum standards, implementing exams, graduation requirements, and division of classes by student age (Richardson 77). In their turn, teachers gradually received better training. From dame school apprenticeship at the beginning of the century wherein pupil-teachers learned on the job with up to one hundred children in a primary class, teacher training was gradually turned over to normal schools and universities, a development that helped enhance the curriculum as well as the quality and status of teaching (Gorsky 89-90).

All such transformations saw their origins in the seeds of change planted at the end of the eighteenth century during the height of the cultural revolution. Nevertheless, at the turn of the century before these educational reforms could become widespread and deeply entrenched, a middle- and upper-class man's schooling connoted a classical, masculine, rational education, a form of pedagogy radically distinct from a late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century woman's education.

By this period women's education had evolved to a point where debate became pervasive and furious. At the beginning of the eighteenth century women in general received no formal education, garnering whatever little instruction they could from their mother. However, women's

educational lot improved somewhat with the rising literacy rate and the eighteenth-century belief in the value of reason. Alice Browne explains that whereas women early in the eighteenth century “could not spell correctly or write coherently, and knew nothing about subjects which were commonplace later,” upper- and middle-class women by the end of the century “were expected to be able to spell correctly, write coherent and readable letters, and have a good grasp of geography and history” (105-06).

Even such minor progressions, however, were met with much contention because of the basic assumption of women’s difference from and inferiority to men. On the one hand, education could be seen to contain women’s “disruptive energy” (V. Jones, *Women in the Eighteenth Century* 99), but on the other, it could prove detrimental to women’s role in the cult of femininity. Susan Gorsky explains that whereas laborers might be distracted and led into rebellion through higher learning, women, who were physically, mentally, maybe morally unfit for serious intellectual effort, could be led astray by their inability to understand what they read; more directly, their education could contradict the perception of women as inferior, gentle, emotional, not intellectual (85-86). Indeed, Fénelon’s *Treatise on the Education of Daughters*, a conduct book highly influential throughout the eighteenth century, advises that “we should be on our guard not to make them [girls] ridiculously learned” because “if women do great good to the community when well educated, they are capable of infinite mischief when viciously instructed” (102-03). Because too much education could prove as dangerous as too little, reformers thus had to indicate clearly how formal learning could prepare women for marriage and motherhood.

By the end of the century, then, when the quest for educational reform was reaching a high point, the question became not whether women should be educated at all, but what schooling would best prepare them for their proper domestic roles, for competition in the marriage market. While it was generally accepted that the daughters of the aristocracy or of families with large, inherited wealth

could study subjects which would be a waste of time for other girls (i.e. foreign languages, music), much debate concerned how much serious reading they should do (Browne 103). More discussion surrounded the education of the class below, the daughters of professional and wealthy tradesmen, whether they should imitate upper-class education or partake of a practical and intellectual schooling (Browne 103). Such pedagogic concerns, in turn, carried nationalistic implications since the increasing number of educated women could help establish England's superiority, yet the low moral standards of upper- and middle-class boarding schools could be seen to provide evidence of England's national decline (V. Jones, *Women in the Eighteenth Century* 98). A woman's "proper" education thus became a matter of serious social and political concern.

Consequently, although women's education at the end of the eighteenth century may have been more formal than previous female schooling, because all reformist attempts were underwritten by distinct notions of gender differentiation and proper sex roles, this improved female education was still greatly unlike men's. In fact, Browne explains that "At the beginning of the century, people usually discussed the question in terms of how much women should be educated; later, the question was more often posed in terms of how male and female education should differ" (102). Thus, while improvements in female education initiated women into formal schooling practices, these advancements served to reinforce idealized and hierarchical gender distinctions.

Such exclusionary educational practices based on sexual categories gained cultural currency largely through the influence of Rousseau, whose *Emile* constituted the "prevailing view" of women's education into the nineteenth century (Agress 57). Rousseau's 1762 text served as one of the two most influential educational treatises in the eighteenth century, along with Locke's earlier (1693) *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (Richardson 44). Both Locke and Rousseau emphasized reasoning and judgement over rote learning and physical punishment, but whereas Locke viewed children as morally neutral, Rousseau saw children as virtuous by nature (Richardson 48-49).



Because Rousseau's child is innocent, hence powerless, a proper education can compensate for early weakness and dependence, but a faulty education can as easily deform. To guard against such corruption, Rousseau sets out an educational program in *Emile* that seeks to perfect reason through feeling as a means of attaining virtue. By allowing Emile to roam free in his secluded, rural surroundings, this environment being carefully arranged by a tutor in advance (Richardson 49-50), Rousseau's pedagogical theory attempts to create an activist citizen whose conscience and reason determine that his personal good must coincide with the good of the community (Deane 62). In this manner, Emile is educated to self-mastery and self-reliance.

Of course, such perfectibility through education is gendered. In Book V of *Emile*, titled "Sophie, or the Woman," Rousseau asserts women's difference, natural and social, from men. Because women are physically weak and in need of protection while suckling children (Richardson 171), their natural dependence confirms their distinct moral and social roles. While man is "strong and active," Rousseau defines woman as "weak and passive," a distinction which leads to the conclusion that woman "is made to please and to be in subjection to man" (322). To prepare women properly for this subordinate position, Rousseau advises that "A woman's education must therefore be planned in relation to man" (328). More specifically, a woman ought to be educated "To be pleasing in his sight, to win his respect and love, to train him in childhood, to tend him in manhood" (328). Thus, while Emile is educated to self-reliance, Sophie is educated to please and depend on Emile. This basic premise of Rousseau's argument, that women are different and therefore in need of a kind of training distinct from man's masculine, intellectual education, strongly influenced, supported, and reflected late eighteenth-century women's educational practices.

In practice, then, women's schooling at the turn of the century was, like men's, class based, but otherwise sex specific. In general, women of the upper classes were educated at home while middle-class girls attended boarding schools and females of the working classes began to receive

meagre instruction at Sunday schools (Agress 67). More specifically, lower middle-class women usually attended a dame school or a government school with children of laborers in which the level of instruction was haphazard, dependent entirely upon the level of the teacher's ambitions (Gorsky 101). Girls of the upper middle classes, on the other hand, either went to private day or boarding schools, often referred to as ladies' academies, or like women of the upper classes, they were educated at home by a governess or by their mother if they lived in a rural community (Gorsky 101). Especially after 1750, these private boarding schools flourished as the main place of instruction for "the daughters of the socially ambitious middle class, the nouveau riche" (Agress 38), largely because women's academies for young ladies provided virtually the only educational opportunities for girls other than home study (Richardson 79). Nevertheless, because these girls' schools were generally more expensive than private boys' academies (Agress 39) and since a woman's education prepared her for marriage rather than self-support, "many parents were reluctant to spend money educating their daughters" (Gorsky 101), so that girls' boarding schools often grew exclusive (Agress 39).

Through this system, a late eighteenth-century woman of the middling and upper ranks received a feminine education specific in form and content. Because educational goals were different for the sexes, curriculum and methodology also differed. Whereas boys were educated to gain useful and improving information, factual and classical knowledge of utilitarian and philosophical value which would prepare them to attend a fine university, girls were encouraged to avoid intellectual curiosity and instead prepare for marriage, their education intended to relieve boredom and enhance their ornamental qualities (Gorsky 101). The typical "feminine" subjects included music, drawing, needlework, reading, writing, penmanship, history, French, common arithmetic, and studies necessary to govern a household and a family.<sup>11</sup> Male subjects, such as the abstruse sciences and the learned languages, were to be avoided so that, without a knowledge of Latin and Greek, women were

effectually excluded from an entire tradition of intellectual achievement and learned argument (Poovey, *Proper Lady* 37). In approaching the “feminine” subjects, women were encouraged to learn only a “little” of everything (Agress 57). Using abridgments, anthologies, and selections rather than practicing extensive or serious reading, women garnered shallow, second-hand knowledge, accepting others’ opinions rather than developing their own (Browne 110). In this manner, women’s education, although improved since the early eighteenth century, still lacked intellectual rigor. Indeed, famous conduct book writer James Fordyce warns women against intense scholarship and abstract thought, “should they push their application so far as to hurt their more tender health, to hinder those family duties for which the sex are chiefly intended, or to impair those softer graces that give them their highest lustre” (qtd. in Leranbaum 282). In short, a traditional feminine education at the end of the eighteenth century, in contrast to man’s masculine instruction, stressed ornamental accomplishments and minimal intellectual engagement.

Like men’s education, however, women’s schooling was to undergo significant transformations throughout the coming century. Educational reform in general came largely through the influence of two educational theories, one liberal, which was Evangelical in origin and humanistic in philosophy, the other practical, which was utilitarian in origin and pragmatic in philosophy (Gorsky 85-87). This general reformist ferment lent urgency and strength to a strain of feminist agitation that reached back to Mary Astell at the beginning of the eighteenth century. In particular, mid-nineteenth-century reformers like Emily Davies called upon these new educational theories as well as significant Victorian social changes, such as the increased number of single women in need of schooling to become self-supporting, to argue for a better education for women (Gorsky 107-08). Although change was slow, it eventually arrived. The mid-century campaign as led by Davies to get an investigation into the deplorable situation of girls’ education forced the government to establish over eighty endowed schools for girls in the last quarter century. By the

1890s a handful of these schools even offered schooling in classical and pragmatic subjects (Gorsky 109). This curriculum shift was partially a response to the newly available higher education for women. In the mid 1840s America's Oberlin became the first coeducational college, and in 1847 the first step toward a formal college education for British women was made when females were allowed to attend evening lectures at King's College. The next year Queen's College opened, functioning as a preparatory school by offering instruction in "masculine subjects," followed by Bedford College and two important secondary schools which also added subjects like ethics, philosophy, and religion to the traditional schooling in feminine accomplishments (Gorsky 108-09). By the 1880s women and men could potentially receive identical educations and pass identical examinations at Cambridge, followed by Oxford in 1894, although the two universities would not award women official recognition or degrees until 1921 and 1920 respectively (Gorsky 113).

But back at the beginning of the nineteenth century before such large-scale developments took place, reformist agitation tended to concentrate around a key debate, one that would feed into future transformations. As previously stated, discussions surrounding women's education at this time tended to concern how to render women most able to fulfil their domestic roles. Such arguments revolved around the distinction between ornamental and useful accomplishments. Browne explains that the principal debate at the turn of the century turned on whether middle- and upper-class women should continue to be schooled in the decorative arts, or whether they should receive instruction in more useful accomplishments, more intellectually demanding subjects, which would emphasize the need for women to develop their own rationality and moral sense rather than relying on the judgement of others (104). Inflamed by Rousseau's privileging of home over school instruction, criticism of boarding schools exploded over the last quarter of the eighteenth century, these academies being attacked for "their regrettable emphasis upon fashionable rather than solid and serious accomplishments" of social, cultural, and intellectual import (Leranbaum 283). Reformist

discourse thus tended to challenge previous acceptance of genteel, ornamental, feminine accomplishments as sufficient education for middle- and upper-class women by asserting women's abilities and responsibilities.

Yet in her analysis of historical feminisms, Browne contends,

Neither kind of education [ornamental or useful] was necessarily feminist, for neither necessarily respected women's minds or taught them to think. Increases in the range of women's education are not in themselves advances in respect for women's rationality. An expanded curriculum did not imply greater respect for women's minds, if it only covered more subjects without making greater intellectual demands. Apparently new subjects, such as natural science, could be treated in an old-fashioned, decorative way, as just another accomplishment. (104-05)

Browne suggests that reformist support for a more useful feminine education did not necessarily prove radical in its ideology, because such discourse need not confirm women's rationality or intellectual capabilities to any great depth or intensity; arguments for a useful education need only assert that women's abilities surpass general assumptions of their severe inadequacies and inferiority. Browne's analysis thereby implies that a "useful" education did not necessarily challenge the distinction between masculine, rational education and feminine, non-intellectual (or limited intellectual) pedagogy. In fact, Alan Richardson concludes that any "such 'mental improvement' must never challenge woman's fundamentally subordinate role, or interfere with the cardinal virtue of modesty, or disrupt the sexual division of society into distinct spheres of activity" (172). Neither analysis suggests that reformist efforts at the turn of the century attempt to unsettle the mutually exclusive sex-gender system's determination of educational practices.

However, I disagree. Certainly, debates surrounding women's education increasingly centred upon the contrasting values of useful and ornamental accomplishments, and undoubtedly dominant ideologies forcefully discouraged direct assaults on conventional divisions in sex roles and gender constructions. Yet I suggest that the mutual exclusivity of the sex-gender equation is exactly the focus of criticism and reconstruction in women novelists' discourse on education. Fenwick,

Hays, Opie, More, Owenson, and Brunton espouse seemingly disparate political and ideological agendas. Yet all six writers attempt, in their own unique ways, to reconstruct the notion of a feminine education while arguing for access to a masculine, rational pedagogy in form and/or content. Miriam Leranbaum claims that during the eighteenth century, “even serious educational tracts gave scant attention to reading lists, pedagogical methods, and actual details of intellectual subject matter,” that the abundance of discourse on women’s education failed to address matters of curriculum or methodology (282). But I suggest that by the end of the century, women writers of fiction engaged fully with these very matters of pedagogical concern. From clearly radical writers like Fenwick, Hays, and Owenson, to the more cautiously discerning Opie and Brunton, to the seemingly reactionary More, these women writers of fiction engage in the criticism of ornamental accomplishments as the basis of a woman’s education in an attempt to redefine and revalue dominant notions of femininity. At the same time, they assert the necessity of women’s access to “masculine” subject matter and, more significantly, to the masculinized, rational process of intellectual rigor and searching, penetrating analysis. Points of emphasis may vary and strategies may differ, but all of these writers, in revalorizing culturally prevalent notions of a properly feminine education and marrying this reconstruction to masculine, rational pedagogy, defy binary constructions of complementary, sex-based schooling and, by extension, gender differentiation; that is, through their discourse on education they construct a third term of gender balance. Because of the mutually influencing relation of education and gender difference, in challenging the late eighteenth-century dualistic education system these women writers disrupt dominant gender ideologies in an attempt to grant women greater cultural agency.

\* \* \*

For a suitable point of departure whence to begin analyzing the educational and gender reforms proposed in these novels, I look to Mary Wollstonecraft. Gary Kelly calls her “the most outstanding feminist of her day” (*English Jacobin Novel* 8), although she certainly was not the first feminist.<sup>12</sup> Her educational concerns were prefigured in the works of women like Mary Astell or the Bluestockings, or more immediately by Catherine Macaulay. Many writers, such as Maria Edgeworth, whose 1798 *Practical Education* written with her father proved a “landmark” in pedagogical writings (Leranbaum 297), as well as More, Hays, and Laetitia-Matilda Hawkins among others, contributed significantly to polemical discussions of women’s education. But Wollstonecraft demands specific attention because her writings as well as her life inform and alter the feminist terrain at the turn of the century, setting the tone and helping to define the parameters for all feminist discourse that follows.

As the “most famous radical rationalist feminist” (Browne 157), Wollstonecraft brings the central educational concerns of her day to focus in her discourse and gives them increased political significance, her *Vindication* “sum[ming] up the feminist ideas which had been developing over nearly a century,” placing them “in the new context of European change” (Kirkham 41). But if her written arguments influenced feminist thinking during and after the revolutionary decade, so did her life. When Godwin published his *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, the general repulsion at and abnegation of Wollstonecraft created what Margaret Kirkham terms “the Great Wollstonecraft Scandal of 1798” (48). Kirkham claims that “everything written on the subject of female emancipation for the next two decades, if not for much longer, has to be understood in light of public reaction to the *Memoirs*, and the violent personal abuse which they provoked” (49). Godwin’s *Memoirs* changed the face of feminism, rendering even the most moderate forms liable to extreme censure. Public awareness of Wollstonecraft’s life thereby influenced the forms of debate on women’s education, the subject becoming highly sensitive, and, as a result, her experience as

much as her work changes the way we need to read subsequent feminist discourse. I now turn, therefore, to Mary Wollstonecraft in whose life and work converge late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century pedagogical issues.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> It is important to note, however, that despite the swelling numbers and shifting constituency, the reading public remained a fairly small segment of the overall population. Although books were made more affordable because of book clubs, subscription libraries, public houses, coffee shops, and circulating or rental libraries (Kelly, *English Fiction* 3-4), the novel-reading public still had to contend with a lack of education, leisure, and privacy (Spender, *Mothers* 156). Eighteenth-century women writers may have had a popular appeal, but their readership was not “mass” by current standards (Spender, *Mothers* 168).

<sup>2</sup> In terms of gender, novels invoked the image of a vulnerable and corruptible young woman suffering the dire effects of novel reading (Gonda xv). According to Johnson, the unreality of romances saves the (female) reader from taking them too seriously, but novels offer mock encounters with the world, vicarious knowledge and experiences to young and impressionable readers; as such, the novel invites emulation, an invitation which may court danger if issued by an irresponsible novelist (Gonda 36). In terms of class, Gary Kelly asserts that many political critics feared the novel would perpetuate aristocratic ideology by transferring it to the middle classes. He explains:

The principal danger, as far as such commentators were concerned, was that novels would become an instrument of ideological penetration by what was seen as decadent aristocratic or gentry culture, depicted as either glamorous libertinism or its transmuted form of sensibility or sentimentalism, into the lives and consciousness of those lower down the social scale. Such penetration, it was thought, would help to ensure the continued ideological and social hegemony of the upper classes. (*English Fiction* 7)

Thus, critics focussed on the novel’s morally and intellectually corrupting potential, but the basis of the criticism was ideological; they feared the novel’s threat to the bourgeoisie (Kelly, *English Fiction* 8).

<sup>3</sup> This presumption, however, is somewhat misrepresentative. Gary Kelly explains that although novels were assumed to be read and written mainly by women, they “were in fact produced and read equally by women and men, albeit with different inflections” (“Women Novelists” 369-70). Kelly goes on to cite “cultural grounds” rather than reasons of readership for gendering the novel as feminine (“Women Novelists” 370).

<sup>4</sup> I find it important to note that although recent studies of conduct book literature, such as Nancy Armstrong’s *Desire and Domestic Fiction*, tend to represent these guidebooks as the voice of the dominant culture, Susan Fraiman demonstrates that the voice of conduct literature was not necessarily singular or uninterrupted. Fraiman details several areas of conflict and transgression in conduct literature including scepticism about the male character, a desire for female community, and women’s ambition for knowledge. I approach conduct literature, therefore, as a culturally acceptable form of female discourse that allows for resistance as well as complicity.

<sup>5</sup> This emphasis on domesticity also provided a means of conciliation in a time of radical flux and change. Mary Poovey suggests that women were being asked to protect the remnants of the old society within the private sphere of the home (*Proper Lady* xv). Thus, as the rise of the bourgeoisie initiated large-scale transformations in British culture, the ideology of domesticity, while furthering

bourgeois interests, also represented a continuance of, rather than a complete break with, past practices and values.

<sup>6</sup> See Vivien Jones's *Women in the Eighteenth Century: Constructions of Femininity* for examples of popular conduct material and Elizabeth Bergen Brophy's *Women's Lives and the 18th-Century English Novel* for excerpts from women's letters, diaries, and journals as these texts relate to eighteenth-century fiction.

<sup>7</sup> Not insignificantly, G.J. Barker-Benfield argues that Wollstonecraft played an integral, if inadvertent, part in this late eighteenth-century repression of female sexuality. The connection of feeling and femininity drawn earlier in the century by the culture of sensibility created a conflict concerning women's susceptibility to their passions. This conflict, Barker-Benfield argues, culminated in the work and reputation of Mary Wollstonecraft. Barker-Benfield writes, "Facing the bogey of a Wollstonecraft depicted as both an Amazon and a woman of sexually unbridled sensibility, literate women consolidated their claim to mind and domesticity at the expense of politics and the sexual promise in sensibility" (*Culture of Sensibility* xxviii). Seeking to avoid a Wollstonecraftian backlash, women writers helped to desexualize domesticity.

<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, it is worth noting that according to Catherine Craft-Fairchild, even when the Man of Feeling became the hero of sentimental fiction, masculine, patriarchal authority was not replaced, but rather displaced from feminized lover to tyrannical father (21). The binary opposition of masculine/feminine at the heart of patriarchy remained constant despite the temporary value granted the feminized male (13).

<sup>9</sup> Of course, chastity plays a key role in this rejection of the intellectual woman. As Mary Poovey explains, the correlation of knowledge and experience, especially in terms of sexual knowledge, invites suspicion of corruption (*Proper Lady* 26). Thus, the cultural need to preserve women's purity and innocence supported the fear that intellectual activity would lead women to ill purposes.

<sup>10</sup> Although the middle- and upper-class mother served as early educator, I do not wish to misrepresent the scope of her influence. Kowaleski-Wallace explains that according to the influential Lockean paradigm, the mother's power as teacher is circumscribed because she acts with the father "as one force in the service of the established ideology. . . . The mother's role in such a process is purely ancillary" (19). The mother as educator functions primarily as intermediary between father and child.

<sup>11</sup> The content of middle- and upper-class women's education at the turn of the century is well documented. For example, see Miriam Leranbaum's "'Mistresses of Orthodoxy'" or Vivien Jones's *Women in the Eighteenth Century*, especially Jones's reprint of excerpts from Hester Chaponé's influential 1773 *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind, addressed to a Young Lady*.

<sup>12</sup> I acknowledge the anachronism in referring to writers of this period as "feminists" since, as Jane Rendall points out, the word was not used in England until 1894 (1). It is, however, a useful and enabling anachronism.

### Chapter Three: Mary Wollstonecraft and Rational Education

Make them free, and they will  
quickly become wise and virtuous,  
as men become more so, for the  
improvement must be mutual.

Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication  
of the Rights of Woman* (1792)

Mary Wollstonecraft was concerned with women's education throughout her life. Like most women of her day, she received little formal education, attending country day schools around Beverly in Yorkshire only briefly (Brody, Introduction 4). For the most part, Wollstonecraft was, from necessity, self-taught. In her early adulthood she worked as a governess in an Irish family and then established a school at Newington Green (Brody, Introduction 5), only to discover that she seemed unsuited to the role of schoolmistress, finding the servant-like position of teachers "unenviable" (Sapiro 11). These experiences as educator, however trying, led to her first published work, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, in 1787. Although this conduct book seems conventional in its efforts to prepare girls for their domestic duties, *Thoughts* contains the intellectual seeds of what was to develop into Wollstonecraft's most important, influential, and detailed statement on women's education, her 1792 *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*.

This latter text, the *Vindication*, is crucial to any study of history, feminism, and education, and it exerts, I will argue, a significant influence on the six women writers in my investigation. That Wollstonecraft enjoyed a personal relationship with several of these novelists is well-documented; both Fenwick (Cameron 117) and Hays (Spender, *Mothers* 267) were dedicated friends of the female

revolutionary, nursing Wollstonecraft on her deathbed. Amelia Opie, as well, admired and befriended Wollstonecraft, although once Godwin's *Memoirs* revealed to the world Wollstonecraft's suicide attempts and sexual affairs, among other social transgressions, Opie's veneration turned to public condemnation (Kirkham 49). While anything but a personal friend, More certainly knew of Wollstonecraft, refusing even to read the *Vindication* (Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution* 27), yet supposedly writing her *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* in direct response to the revolutionary feminist (Brody, Introduction 35). Despite any such personal connections, however, I suggest that Wollstonecraft's impact on these and other women writers was intellectual rather than personal. Wollstonecraft's work, with all of its disruptions and instabilities, redefines the terms of the debate on women's education, imbuing the cultural issue with a political and social significance not seen before and not to be ignored.

Although contemporary critics commonly hail Wollstonecraft as the first major feminist (Brody, Introduction 1), to claim her as the only woman polemicist worthy of study at the end of the eighteenth century would be to do disservice to the many other women writing at this time on the issue of education. Laetitia-Matilda Hawkins, Jane West, Sarah Trimmer, Mary Anne Radcliffe, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Maria Edgeworth, and Clara Reeve are but a few of the women writers contributing to the debate on female pedagogy at the end of the century. Yet Wollstonecraft was unique among these women for the purposes to which she turned previous arguments concerning women's education, for the particular challenges she waged against traditional assumptions of women's (in)abilities. In her assessment of Wollstonecraft's impact, Miriam Brody contends,

Wollstonecraft is not so much the inheritor of a feminist tradition as she is the writer of its manifesto. Before Wollstonecraft, there were works suggesting the reform of female manners or proposals for improving female education, but there was no single-minded criticism of the social and economic system which created a double standard of excellence for male and female and relegated women to an inferior status. (Introduction 25)

Before Wollstonecraft, Mary Astell may have called for a women's college, and the intellectual

achievements of the Bluestockings may have cast doubt on assumptions concerning women's capacity to reason, but like most reformers these women did not challenge conventional attitudes of female inferiority (Brody, Introduction 28; 33-34). Even Catherine Macaulay, to whom Wollstonecraft pays homage in the *Vindication* for Macaulay's recognition that women are constructed by their environment so that their supposedly "natural" limitations require questioning, fails to criticize female manners and female agency (Brody, Introduction 36). But Wollstonecraft, by applying revolutionary political notions of inherent rights and freedoms to women, offers a comprehensive and sustained challenge to long-accepted notions of womanhood and femininity through her discourse on education. Her argument is so all-embracing, in fact, that according to Brody, "one may say that all feminists, radical and conservative, who followed Wollstonecraft are her philosophic descendants" (Introduction 58). Wollstonecraft's political concerns refigured and opened the debate concerning gender, sex, and education in a way British society had not yet seen and, as a result, made a profound impact on the pedagogical and feminist thinking that followed.

More specifically, I suggest that through her forceful argument in favor of pedagogical reform and her discussion of women's education as a means of constructing gender representations, Wollstonecraft attempts to deconstruct the socio-political text of eighteenth-century culture. This revolutionary discourse on women's education is radical not only in a political sense, that is, in its Jacobin insistence on individual rights and liberties, but also in an epistemological sense; Wollstonecraft attempts to go "to the root" of conventional eighteenth-century gender constructions, to identify and examine the representations of femininity and masculinity predominant in her culture in order to reconstruct those representations. In so doing, Wollstonecraft's analysis, although written long before contemporary theory overtook the academic arena, anticipates what Spivak terms "the reversal-displacement morphology" (*Other Worlds* 84) of deconstruction. In her socio-political commentary on women's education, Wollstonecraft exposes the binary opposition of the late

eighteenth-century patriarchal sex-gender system—the correlation of men with masculinity and women with femininity—as well as the hierarchy implicit in this binary, as socially-constructed equations perpetuated by educational practices rather than an inherent reality. The *Vindication* then goes on to reverse this binary through privileging masculinized women and ultimately attempts to displace the binary altogether, shattering the mutual exclusivity proposed by the culturally dominant sex-gender equation by offering women an alternative construction of civic motherhood that promotes a balance of masculinity and femininity. By challenging dominant notions of both the form and content of a woman's proper education, Wollstonecraft deconstructs the prevailing sex-gender system's construction of the late eighteenth-century woman.<sup>1</sup>

As overtly resistant and deeply disruptive as is Wollstonecraft's agenda concerning women, however, the efficacy and progressiveness of her feminism is partially compromised by her relative neglect of the eighteenth-century male. Despite her clear contention that “a revolution in female manners” (*VRW* 133)<sup>2</sup> must begin with men (Brody, “Mary Wollstonecraft” 57), Wollstonecraft makes little or no effort to extend her radical gender revisions to the male sex. She clearly criticizes specific segments of the male population, the aristocracy and military in particular, for failing to live up to standards of masculinity, and she faults the educational system for failing to inculcate properly the emerging notion of bourgeois masculinity coming to dominate British culture, but the men she addresses in her pedagogical argument, the professional middle-class men who embody the educated masculine ideal, are rarely even mentioned, let alone analyzed. To these men she counsels revision in their perceptions and treatment of women, but she offers little if any reformation of men's gendered notions of themselves beyond a further entrenchment of masculinity. Rejecting any configuration of the feminized male, she neither reverses nor displaces the sex-gender equation for men, but rather firmly reasserts it. This glorification of bourgeois masculinity implies a certain collusion with patriarchal prescriptions and circumscribes the reformist potential of her liberal

feminist proposals. The silences thus qualify the radicalism of Wollstonecraft's overt project by reaffirming the patriarchal order she otherwise subverts. Such limitations, I suggest, are as significant as Wollstonecraft's radical assertions in influencing the female writers on pedagogy and feminism who follow.

In order to understand Wollstonecraft's pedagogical argument in the *Vindication* and the gender implications therein, the reader must first recognize that Wollstonecraft relies on Enlightenment and revolutionary thought to fuel her radical criticism, only she extends the application of egalitarian, humanistic, and individualistic principles to include women. She opens her discussion by equating virtue and reason (VRW 91), suggesting that the path to morality and human perfectibility lies through the freedom to exercise and develop one's rational capacities. She defines reason as "the simple power of improvement; or, more properly speaking, of discerning truth" (VRW 143). More specifically, she suggests,

The power of generalizing ideas, of drawing comprehensive conclusions from individual observations, is the only acquirement, for an immortal being, that really deserves the name of knowledge. Merely to observe, without endeavouring to account for anything, may (in a very incomplete manner) serve as the common sense of life; but where is the store laid up that is to clothe the soul when it leaves the body? (VRW 145)

To Wollstonecraft, reason is no "free-floating calculating machine," to use Virginia Sapiro's term (52). Rational knowledge and understanding is a process involving not merely individual observation or a Lockean response to sensory stimuli, but, more importantly, the ability to generalize from those empirical recognitions, to combine ideas, to form abstractions and principles through logical operations. Such reasoning abilities, in turn, determine one's moral posture.

However, while the individual is born with an innate rational capacity, developing the ability to reason productively requires effort and practice. Working from Locke's associational and environmental psychology, his "*tabula rasa* conception of consciousness" which suggests that the environment plays a significant role in the development of reason (Gatens 22), Wollstonecraft

identifies education as crucial to the formation of the individual's reasoning powers. By *education*, of course, Wollstonecraft does not mean simply formal schooling, although she has much to say concerning systematic educational practices at the turn of the century. As Sapiro points out, Wollstonecraft also uses the term in "the broader sense more common in her day, more like our current conceptions of 'child-raising' or 'socialization'" (27). According to Wollstonecraft, then, the proper work of education both in the sense of formal schooling and child-rearing is to develop habits of mind which cultivate rational thought. She explains:

By individual education, I mean, for the sense of the word is not precisely defined, such an attention to a child as will slowly sharpen the sense, form the temper, regulate the passions as they begin to ferment, and set the understanding to work before the body arrives at maturity; so that the man may only have to proceed, not to begin, the important task of learning to think and reason. (*VRW* 102)

Because the individual's moral character depends on the ability to think rationally, the goal of education, Wollstonecraft asserts, is the development of the independent, intellectual ability to reason toward virtue.

What is most striking about this pedagogical analysis is that Wollstonecraft extends these rational principles to women. Wollstonecraft reverses the idea made popular by Rousseau and others that women are primarily sexual beings, suggesting instead that men are actually dominated by sexual impulses, that Rousseau is, indeed, slave to his own sensualism (Trouelle 324-25). Like men, women have souls (*VRW* 143) and are born with rational capacity; as such, they too need the opportunity to develop that reason. However, conventional educational practices deny women such opportunity because for them, "the cultivation of the understanding is always subordinate to the acquirement of some corporeal accomplishment" (*VRW* 105). Wollstonecraft explains that

the little knowledge which women of strong minds attain is from various circumstances, of a more desultory kind than the knowledge of men, and it is acquired more by sheer observations of real life than from comparing what has been individually observed with the results of experience generalized by speculation. Led by their dependent situation and domestic employments more into society, what they learn is rather by snatches; and as learning is with them in general only a



secondary thing, they do not pursue any one branch with that persevering ardour necessary to give vigour to the faculties and clearness to the judgement. (VRW 104-05)

Bereft of privacy, their time spent performing domestic duties, women cannot pursue their studies in any depth, learning only by “snatches,” so that while they can observe the world, they are unable to take the next step toward rationality, to generalize from these individual observations and experiences. That is, their “instinctive common sense” is “never brought to the test of reason” (VRW 104). Based on pedagogical models such as Rousseau’s *Emile*, the late eighteenth-century educational system schools men in worldly, rational discourse but trains women for romance and marriage rather than motherhood and social responsibility, preparing women for “nothing other than ‘to catch a man’” (Falco 3). Taught by their feminine, ornamental education to value appearances, trivialities, and sensuality, women are denied the occasion granted men to become independent, reasoning, virtuous beings, to perfect themselves through knowledge.

As a result of this inadequate education, women are rendered men’s inferior; they are not innately so. Such inequality and oppression not only harm women by inhibiting the growth of their souls toward virtue, but also, because women raise the citizens of the future, hurt society in general by keeping women from participating in social progress. As Maria Falco explains, “all of society suffers because of the incapacitation of one half of the human race, and their inability to participate in, or to assist in, their children’s achievement of ‘civic virtue’” (3-4). To rectify this basic inequality, Wollstonecraft calls for “a revolution in female manners” (VRW 133), thereby co-opting the topical and notorious term of violent overthrow in order to invoke French Revolutionary notions of equality and liberty in support of a fundamental and necessary shift in women’s education. More specifically, this pedagogy-based revolution must begin with women of the middling ranks since Wollstonecraft, with her bourgeois political bias, finds the middle classes “to be in the most natural state” (VRW 81), meaning untainted by aristocratic decadence and unburdened by working-class

drudgery, therefore most able to evolve progressively and rationally. She claims, "Let woman share the rights, and she will emulate the virtues of man" (VRW 327); give women an education which allows them to develop their rational capacity rather than merely their sensibility and ornamental accomplishments, and they too can be virtuous.

To effect such a transformation, Wollstonecraft proposes a series of educational reforms which would create a national system of co-educational day schools. From the beginning of her writing career, Wollstonecraft was highly critical of boarding schools. In *Thoughts* she attacks girls' boarding schools for their emphasis on manners, accomplishments, and beauty while neglecting temper and understanding (22). In the *Vindication* she turns her attention to boys' boarding schools, diagnosing them as "the hotbeds of vice and folly" which encourage libertinism, dissipation, and indulgence (280) by substituting arbitrary for rational authority and by perpetuating abusive hierarchical structures. Private education, on the other hand, can "inspire a love of home and domestic pleasures" necessary to the formation of virtuous citizens (VRW 285), but the separation from other children interferes with an appreciation of equality and community. Wollstonecraft concludes, therefore, that "The only way to avoid two extremes equally injurious to morality, would be to contrive some way of combining a public and private education" (VRW 281). A day school would allow the child to "mix" with equals during the waking hours and then cultivate the domestic affections at home every night (VRW 300). Wollstonecraft's proposal thus effectively deconstructs the opposition of private and public education to create a stronger and, in her terms, more rational alternative.

What is more, these day schools are to be co-educational. Wollstonecraft proclaims, "Day-schools for particular ages should be established by Government, in which boys and girls might be educated together" (VRW 292). This statement recalls Wollstonecraft's position that government funding is necessary to free teachers and schools from dependence on parents, to liberate them from

having to please the parent as employer (VRW 286). More importantly, this passage affirms that the sexes need to be educated together in order to gain knowledge of each other, knowledge that would encourage friendship and companionship rather than coquetry and gallantry. In fact, for children between the ages of five and nine, Wollstonecraft argues that the same education should be free and open to all classes as well as both sexes. After age nine it seems that certain class and sexual distinctions would be reasserted, since Wollstonecraft suggests that girls intended for domestic employments and boys looking toward the mechanical trades should attend vocational schools, learning together in the morning but studying separate trades in the afternoon (VRW 293). However, at this age, “young people of superior abilities, or fortune” of both sexes would be taught in an academic school, continuing their intellectual pursuits together (VRW 294). For the attempt to bring sexes as well as classes into one, nationally-supported school system, these recommendations constitute, according to Alan Richardson, “one of the most radical educational proposals of the eighteenth century” (178).

The implications for women of Wollstonecraft’s proposal are profound. Rather than limiting women to a conventional schooling in feminine accomplishments, Wollstonecraft asserts women’s right of access to a classical, rational, masculine education in form and content. In her analysis of feminist writings of the eighteenth century, Alice Browne explains that Wollstonecraft’s “insistence that women should be better educated is not controversial, but her refusal to limit the kinds of intellectual inquiry women should engage in is; most writers assume that women should avoid subjects which demand very concentrated thought” (158). But these were the very kinds of subjects Wollstonecraft saw as necessary to female rational development. Instead of acquiring knowledge “relative to accomplishments” (VRW 295), in day school girls would pursue the same studies as boys, exploring subjects like “botany, mechanics, and astronomy; reading, writing, arithmetic, natural history and some simple experiments in natural philosophy,” as well as “religion, history, the history

of man, and politics,” while having ample time to strengthen their bodies outside at “gymnastic play” (VRW293). In short, women would receive a substantial rather than a superficial education, and they would do so through concentrated, searching, vigorous intellectual scrutiny. Wollstonecraft criticizes the exaggerated familiarity (VRW 239), the constant interruptions, the lack of privacy that hinders women’s intellectual investigation (VRW 240). She also criticizes rote learning (VRW 225) and memorization (VRW 287) as counter-productive to rational development. Women need to “take a more comprehensive view of things,” to be “more rationally educated,” she argues, in order to exercise their understanding (VRW 228). A national system of day schools would allow women to extend their learning from simple observation to rational generalizations and abstract principles, thereby developing their reasoning abilities and moral character in the same manner as men.

Because education plays such a key role in the creation, translation, and inculcation of gender ideology, these reformist proposals in turn attempt to effect a transformation of dominant late eighteenth-century gender constructions. Throughout her argument Wollstonecraft clearly and vehemently aggrandizes reason as the arbiter of individual morality and its development as the only acceptable purpose, the only constructive and socially progressive end of education for women as well as men. In supporting this analysis she rejects the cultural emphasis on sensibility as the singular basis of female existence, suggesting that the passions need to be regulated by reason, that “the obligation to check them is the duty of mankind” (VRW 243). Responding to such claims, Cora Kaplan concluded in 1985 that “It is Mary Wollstonecraft who first offered women [the] fateful choice between the opposed and moralized bastions of reason and feeling, which continues to determine much feminist thinking” (155). Although Kaplan retreats minimally in her attack by subsequently implying that Rousseau, as Wollstonecraft’s mentor, bears some responsibility for this “fateful choice” by influencing his student’s thoughts on gender and revolutionary politics, Kaplan clearly faults Wollstonecraft for endorsing rationality at the expense of emotion, a criticism to which

many contemporary scholars feel obliged to respond.<sup>3</sup>

Without addressing this contentious debate directly, I find significant the gender implications of Kaplan's claim. As already demonstrated, political, historical, and cultural forces conspired at the end of the eighteenth century increasingly to connect reason with masculinity and feeling with femininity. Wollstonecraft unmistakably recognizes this gender association, spending much of her *Vindication* detailing the arbitrariness of its sexual prescriptions. Extending Kaplan's argument, then, to include this understanding of gender, in asserting the need for women's access to a rational, hence masculine education instead of their instruction in the feminine arts of sensuality, sensitivity, and flattery, Wollstonecraft appears to privilege the masculine over the feminine. Indeed, she says, "I presume that *rational* men will excuse me for endeavouring to persuade [women] to become more masculine and respectable" (83).<sup>4</sup> In this manner, Wollstonecraft's emphasis on educating women rationally clearly reverses the conventional sex-gender binary for females by envisioning masculinized women.

However, this overt privileging of rationality and classical, masculine education does not necessarily imply a "casting out" of feminine otherness (Wilson 89), as Kaplan's analysis would suggest. While endeavoring to gain women's access to masculinity through education, Wollstonecraft neither rejects nor represses the feminine; rather, she reconstructs it. Throughout the *Vindication* she chastises women for their "exaggerated effeminization" (Barker-Benfield, "Mary Wollstonecraft" 109), for their complicity with a cultural and educational system that denies them their rights (e.g. 126, 131, 206). Yet her criticism of conventional women as schooled in ornamental accomplishments does not include a blanket attack on all that is perceived as feminine. Instead, a discriminating Wollstonecraft tries to revalue, to rehabilitate the feminine as perpetuated by women's educational practices, to divest it of its negative traits and connotations and maintain or reconstruct a positive sense of femininity.

For example, her criticism of negative femininity as constructed by female education is copious. At various points in her argument she attacks as destructive the conventionally feminine traits of sentimentality, vanity, artificiality, mindlessness, delicacy, and inconstancy, among many others. Yet all culturally defined and prescribed feminine qualities are not necessarily harmful. In responding to Dr. Gregory's conduct book advice for the proper woman, Wollstonecraft writes,

Gentleness of manners, forbearance and long suffering, are such amiable Godlike qualities, that in sublime poetic strains the Deity has been invested with them; and, perhaps, no representation of His goodness so strongly fastens on the human affections as those that represent Him abundant in mercy and willing to pardon. Gentleness, considered in this point of view, bears on its front all the characteristics of grandeur, combined with the winning graces of condescension; but what a different aspect it assumes when it is the submissive demeanour of dependence, the support of weakness that loves, because it wants protection; and is forbearing, because it must silently endure injuries; smiling under the lash at which it dare not snarl. Abject as this picture appears, it is the portrait of an accomplished woman, according to the received opinion of female excellence, separated by specious reasoners from human excellence. (VRW 117-18)

In this passage Wollstonecraft discusses the conventionally feminine traits of gentleness, forbearance, and long suffering without immediately rejecting them as destructive. Rather, she suggests these are, in fact, "Godlike qualities," a reference which at once feminizes God and elevates femininity to superior, divine status. She then goes on to illustrate how these positive attributes become negative; gentleness and forbearance, potentially divine traits, devolve into menial derivatives of dependence when women are forced to assume subordinate, restricted positions. She clearly suggests that such traits typically associated with femininity could be positive were the environment altered.

More significantly, near the end of the *Vindication* Wollstonecraft attempts to reclaim sensibility itself, the cornerstone of eighteenth-century femininity, by reconstructing it in a more virtuous form.<sup>5</sup> She writes, "Women are supposed to possess more sensibility, and even humanity, than men," but that because of women's lack of education or the "clinging affection of ignorance," this sensibility is rendered narrow, degenerating into selfishness (VRW 320). As a result, men often exercise more generosity than women. She goes on to state, however, that such "exclusive affection"

is not “a proof of the inferiority of the [female] sex,” but rather it is “the natural consequence of confined views,” that is, of a superficial education (VRW 320). The implication once again is that feminine sensibility could cultivate greatness in the proper environment, that “the heart would expand as the understanding gained strength, if women were not depressed from their cradles” (VRW 320). Here Wollstonecraft is at her discerning, radical best, rewriting the dominant gender text of her culture by redefining and rehabilitating the very notion of femininity itself.

Of course, when attempting to envision this ideal of reconstructed femininity within an actual socio-political dynamic, Wollstonecraft focusses exclusively on mothers, or, more specifically, middle-class mothers, her bourgeois bias proving a consistent limiting factor in her text. In isolated instances she discusses a progressive view of women outside the home, suggesting that women need economic independence and legal equality through access to private business and careers such as medicine and midwifery (VRW 266); she even goes so far as to imagine a women’s representative in government (VRW 265). Such suggestions, however, are anomalies in the text. The main thrust of Wollstonecraft’s argument is to create wiser and more virtuous mothers and wives. She repeatedly insists that the central drawback of a woman’s feminine education is that it leaves her ill-prepared for her primary functions, for domesticity and maternity, and, more specifically, for her role as educator of her children (e.g. VRW 163, 263-67, 271). She claims, “Make women rational creatures and free citizens, and they will quickly become good wives and mothers” (366). Wollstonecraft urges women to think, to develop their reason, but women’s primary function according to the *Vindication* remains motherhood.

This recourse to the maternal may seem a reactionary gesture,<sup>6</sup> but it is not entirely problematic. To begin with, Wollstonecraft’s notion of motherhood must be understood in its historical context. Mitzi Myers asserts that in any revolutionary climate the role of woman becomes an important issue (“Reform or Ruin” 199-200), and certainly in France, as the state was decaying

at the time of the Revolution, women became the focal point for moral regeneration. Ruth Graham explains that the political establishment promoted Rousseau's ideal of pregnant and nursing women as personifications of the regeneration of France, even while exalting women as goddesses of reason (250). Writing during the French Revolution and the professional bourgeois revolution in Britain, Wollstonecraft clearly responds to this kind of gender politics with her own moral argument. She suggests that it is precisely because women have the responsibility of regenerating society that they must be given a proper, rational education; as the earliest teachers of future generations of citizens, mothers are in a key position to bring about historical change and they must be trained accordingly. Wollstonecraft's recourse to motherhood, therefore, can be seen in part as a strategy in response to revolutionary ideology.

More to the point, it is in this insistence on the social responsibility of women that Wollstonecraft's notion of the maternal defies conventional expectations and dictates. While maintaining the traditional primacy of woman's roles as mother and wife, Wollstonecraft asserts the necessity of making these roles socially significant, suggesting that mothers should manage their families, educate their children, and assist their neighbors as a means of helping society in general (VRW 300-06), as a civic duty (VRW 321-24). Wollstonecraft insists that "in order to render their private virtue a public benefit, [women] must have a civil existence in the State, married or single" (VRW 267); women must be allowed, encouraged, and educated to participate as active citizens in the broader, cultural sphere beyond their homes. In order to satisfy such civic responsibility, women's "first duty is to find themselves as rational creatures" (VRW 263) and then to fulfil their role as mother in direct support of the community. Through this ideal of rational motherhood Wollstonecraft, according to Miriam Brody, challenges the industrialized state's notion of the separate spheres. Brody asserts that "If [Wollstonecraft] cannot, or will not, move woman out of the home, she will move the home, with the woman in it, toward the state" ("Mary Wollstonecraft" 52).



Wollstonecraft may not emancipate women from their domestic roles as wives and mothers, but her perception of rational, civic motherhood takes the feminine to the mainstream.

Thus, although Wollstonecraft's refusal to envision women beyond maternity remains a limitation in her argument, this restriction does not unduly compromise the radical structure of her gender ideology. Not only does she reverse the conventional sex-gender equation for females by arguing for women's access to masculinity in the form of a rational education, but she also displaces the equation altogether by simultaneously revalorizing and reconstructing the feminine. Through her discourse on education and her insistence on specific pedagogical reforms, Wollstonecraft proposes an alternative to the binary opposition that dominates patriarchal formations; she offers women a gender balance in the ideal of woman as a hybrid of masculinity and rehabilitated femininity. This third term, this alternative ideal of civic motherhood which links the private and public, the masculine and feminine, confirms the radical extreme of Wollstonecraft's feminism.<sup>7</sup>

This highly disruptive vision, however, becomes immediately compromised by the *Vindication's* representation of men. Wollstonecraft makes no attempt to match her reconstruction of femininity with a similar reconstruction of masculinity. In fact, she makes little effort even to investigate, at least to any persuasive degree, the classical, masculine education she so privileges. In her political analysis of Wollstonecraft's work, Sapiro suggests that one of the main "errors plagu[ing] interpretations of Wollstonecraft's views on education" is the assumption that "Wollstonecraft's goal was to give girls access to the same education that boys had in her day, missing the point that she rejected the contemporary system of education for both boys and girls" (237). Sapiro is correct insofar as Wollstonecraft clearly criticizes boys' as well as girls' boarding schools, but the contemporary critic's assertion needs qualification. In her analysis of formal schooling, Wollstonecraft castigates boys' boarding schools because in their present state they do not adequately teach rational education; she does not, however, criticize that classical, masculine

education itself. Of the many radical proposals Wollstonecraft offers in her scheme of national co-education, all concern organization and redistribution only. She does not challenge her idealized notion of a rational education in either form or content. Only sporadically does she explore the substance of a boy's education, suggesting, for example, that boys should learn that modesty/chastity is a human, not a female, virtue (VRW 238), and that gallantry is as harmful to men as coquetry is to women (VRW 294). But even in these instances Wollstonecraft examines masculine education only insofar as boys are being taught to see and treat girls. Rarely does she explore what men are being taught about how to see themselves. Instead, she offers rational education with its classical subject matter and penetrating, intellectual scrutiny as the basis of educational reform, arguing that women need access to it and both sexes need a better system to teach it. Wollstonecraft privileges masculine education as the key to social reform, then, but other than defining its rational basis, she idealizes rather than analyzes this classical, masculine pedagogy.

Such a lapse in critical inquiry seems significant because although Wollstonecraft is concerned with the rights of "Woman," she clearly addresses men. She begins by dedicating her work to the French revolutionary, M. Talleyrand-Périgord (VRW 85), a dedication which conveys an appeal to include girls in Talleyrand's radical proposal for a national education system in France. More significantly, although she does not often address them directly, professional, intellectual men of the middle ranks who "have, in one station at least, an opportunity of exerting themselves with dignity" (VRW 149) are the consistent recipients of her appeal to "let woman share [their] rights" (VRW 327) and "generously snap our chains" (VRW 269), since women have no political power to take those rights and secure liberty for themselves. Even if, as Amy Smith (556) and others recently contend, Wollstonecraft addresses the *Vindication* to both sexes, men still factor heavily in her notion of reform. As embodiments of the masculine education Wollstonecraft endorses, these professional middle-class men largely escape criticism beyond their treatment of women, and this obvious

idealization renders Wollstonecraft's position as an objective critic suspect. More importantly, this glorification rather than investigation of masculine education leads to a subtler omission in the text in that Wollstonecraft does not offer men, as she does women, an alternative gender construction. Indeed, in her brief assessment of Wollstonecraft's text, Rosemarie Tong accurately acknowledges that "It did not occur to Wollstonecraft to question the value of traditional male traits" (15). Certainly, Wollstonecraft reverses the sex-gender equation for men by representing feminized males, but this reversal is always represented in the negative and, consequently, rejected.

Specifically, Wollstonecraft presents two versions of the feminized male, neither of which belongs to her favored bourgeois class. In her criticism of the aristocratic court tradition, Wollstonecraft claims that men as well as women of the upper classes are negatively feminized by the tyranny and arbitrary authority accompanying hereditary wealth (VRW 93-99). Because "power feminizes those who wield it" (Wilson 93), aristocratic men, including the king (VRW 148), are as useless, inert, and irrational as the ladies they marry. Similarly, Wollstonecraft details the destructive feminization of the soldier in a standing army. She argues that like women, soldiers are subjected to a deficient education, so that

they both acquire manners before morals, and a knowledge of life before they have from reflection any acquaintance with the grand ideal outline of human nature. The consequence is natural. Satisfied with common nature, they become a prey to prejudices, and taking all their opinions on credit, they blindly submit to authority. So that if they have any sense, it is a kind of instinctive glance that catches proportions, and decides with respect to manners, but fails when arguments are to be pursued below the surface, or opinions analysed. (VRW 106)

Because they lack training which develops independent, rational thought, military men are stunted by superficial knowledge and casual observation. Without an opportunity to exercise their reason, they develop negative feminine characteristics. Subjected to arbitrary authority with no will of their own, "they live only to please," cultivating a love of gallantry, a blind obedience, and an exaggerated attentiveness to their appearance (VRW 106). Like women, military men suffer from the morally and

intellectually harmful effects of an education which privileges submission and superficiality to the detriment of rationality.

This consistent and whole-hearted repudiation of the feminized male can be explained in part as a product of Wollstonecraft's politics. Two years prior to the publication of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft responded to Burke's criticism of the French Revolution in her *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* by accusing Burke of effeminacy, of abandoning reason and virtue in his sentimental defence of aristocratic privilege (Kelly, "Revolutionary and Romantic Feminism" 120). Claudia Johnson explains that in the 1790s, the conservative Burke, in reaction to the Jacobin focus on reason, constructed feeling as manly (*Equivocal Beings* 34). Determining that the political crisis in France resulted from "monstrously coldhearted men," Burke hailed the man of feeling in his newly constructed guise of sentimental masculinity as the protector of the state because of the man of feeling's love of home and family (Johnson, *Equivocal Beings* 6-7). However, this is in no way to suggest that Burke favored effeminacy, despite Wollstonecraft's accusation. On the contrary, according to Johnson the 1790s witnessed a "masculinization of sensitivity" (*Equivocal Beings* 30), wherein the affective practices associated with sentimentality were "valued *not* because they [were] understood as feminine, but precisely and only insofar as they [had] been recoded as masculine" (*Equivocal Beings* 14). The sentimental man thus appropriated the feminine, yet he still appeared masculine because of the complementary "hyperfeminization" of women required by male sentimentality "to sustain the possibility of sexual differentiation" (Johnson, *Equivocal Beings* 45). Burke and the political conservatives, therefore, privileged this notion of sentimental masculinity as the British safeguard against revolutionary violence.

In response to such political posturing, the radical Wollstonecraft identifies precisely these conservative, aristocratic, feminized men of feeling as a primary source of Britain's, and certainly women's, social problems. Johnson argues that Wollstonecraft rejects sentimental masculinity in

favor of the bourgeois notion of republican masculinity (*Equivocal Beings* 8), going so far as to advocate an alternative form of gender asymmetry by implying that “men’s hypermasculinity is required to guarantee and ensure the possibility of female rationality” (*Equivocal Beings* 45). Indeed, throughout *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* Wollstonecraft’s assessments of prevailing educational practices consistently endorse the emergent notion of republican or rational masculinity at the expense of older, waning court definitions of manhood. It is this bourgeois political bias that renders Wollstonecraft unable, or at least unwilling, to envision a positive version of the feminized male in the aristocracy, in the military, and certainly not in the middle classes, since the professional bourgeois man embodies the greatest hope of reforming society through rational masculinity. According to Wollstonecraft’s gender ideology, neither men nor women are rational, hence masculine, enough.

Through her negative representations of the feminized male, then, Wollstonecraft, in Laurie Finke’s words, “collapses the distinction between male and female forms of power” (141), brilliantly illustrating the argument that women’s inferiority is not innate but, rather, is a product of social conditioning and education. But Wollstonecraft rejects these reversals of the sex-gender equation for men as negative without offering any acceptable alternative; she makes no attempt to extend her notion of rehabilitated, reconstructed femininity to men. Consequently, in her representation of the eighteenth-century male Wollstonecraft explores an unacceptable reversal without displacement and, as such, reasserts, rather than deconstructs, the sex-gender binary as it applies to men. In a patriarchal system grounded in a fundamentalist opposition between men and women, this reaffirmation of the sex-gender association for men seriously compromises the potential viability of Wollstonecraft’s feminist proposals. Attempting to alter one side only, especially the disenfranchised side, of a dichotomous equation allows, if it does not invite, reversion to tradition and undermines Wollstonecraft’s efforts to sustain any effective, lasting gender reform. As a result, Wollstonecraft’s

bourgeois political bias circumscribes her revolutionary feminism.

It may seem rather harsh to fault Wollstonecraft for omissions in a text which, from a feminist and pedagogical perspective, envisions so much. But Wollstonecraft herself asserts that “the improvement” she seeks “must be mutual” (*VRW* 296), that men as well as women have to change in order to improve society. In limiting this gender reform for eighteenth-century men primarily to the understanding and treatment of women rather than themselves (at least beyond a further entrenchment of men’s masculinity), Wollstonecraft fails to consider fully the implications of the proposals she offers. This limited perception and exploration of the eighteenth-century male thus defines her complicity with patriarchal prescriptions, a collusion which tempers the radicalism of the *Vindication*’s overt agenda.

Claudia Johnson argues that although Wollstonecraft divorces sex from gender in the case of women, the polemicist’s “belief in the coextensiveness of sex and gender in the case of men becomes harder and more problematic to sustain” (*Equivocal Beings* 25). Indeed, what remains an implicit limitation in the *Vindication* becomes an overt problem in *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria* when Wollstonecraft attempts to put her social and educational theories into practice.

In the *Vindication* Wollstonecraft suggests that she will write a subsequent volume on the wrongs of the female sex, and *The Wrongs of Woman* is generally accepted as her unfinished attempt at fulfilling this promise. Written in 1797 and left in progress when Wollstonecraft died, this novel expands the author’s previous bourgeois focus to explore the sufferings of women of all classes, especially as represented in the two main female characters. Gary Kelly identifies the eponymous heroine as a “woman of the class on the border between the middle class and the gentry” (*English Fiction* 38), but her jailor turned rescuer and friend, Jemima, is firmly working class. The oppression of these two women is replicated in the many inset narratives of women from various classes, thereby underscoring the “commonality of female experience” (Ty 42) in a patriarchal system. Kelly

explains that the clearly Jacobin novel “aims to show that all of those wrongs are rooted in the false consciousness of a society dominated by court and gentry notions of property, family, and gender, and in the internalization of that false consciousness by women, in the social constructions of their selves” (*English Fiction* 40). Indeed, trapped in a terrible marriage to a wealth-seeking libertine, Maria’s enslavement by marriage and property laws culminates in her trial for seduction and adultery, wherein her written plea for female emancipation meets with disdain and easy dismissal by the male-centred legal system. This novel thus reveals a deeper and more personal understanding of how the patriarchal system functions through all of its institutions to repress women.

As one such institution, the educational system remains key to Wollstonecraft’s prevailing concerns. In her Preface to the novel Wollstonecraft explains that she intends “to show the wrongs of different classes of women, equally oppressive, though, from the difference of education, necessarily various” (*WW* 60). As a woman of the middle to upper ranks, Maria receives the kind of harmful, feminine, sentimental education Wollstonecraft attacks in the *Vindication*, and the consequences prove dire. Although her mother’s “indolence of character” prevents the older woman from seeing to Maria’s schooling, the young Maria is bolstered by her wanderings in “the healthy breeze of a neighboring heath” and by instruction from her liberally educated uncle (*WW* 96). Yet despite this initial grounding in rational tutelage and Maria’s natural capacity for rational thought—she is “accustomed to generalize from her observations” (*WW* 73)—Maria’s early intellectual development is hindered by her uncle’s departure, but, more importantly, by her inability to gain worldly experience in support of her reasoning powers. In her memoir to her daughter, Maria defies Rousseauvian notions of a secluded education by advising the young girl to “Gain experience” (*WW* 95), because Maria’s own worldly inexperience causes her to “form an ideal picture of life” (*WW* 98), a picture which continually leads her astray. Instead of gaining experience through a substantial early education, the adult Maria must gain her education through experience, and the

result is a life of pain and suffering.

This pedagogical relationship with her uncle thus proves both constructive and destructive for Maria. Rhonda Batchelor contends that the older man's liberal support of individualism teaches Maria to trust her subjective perceptions in spite of social dictates, thereby empowering her, to use Batchelor's rather dismissive phrase, "to ignore the merely social determinations of individual worth" in order to help others and develop a class-transgressive friendship with the fallen Jemima (348-49). Certainly, her uncle's influence helps Maria resist particular conventions and customs (e.g. she leaves a bad marriage and initiates an extra-marital coupling with Darnford), although the results of her transgressions are not always as positive as her relationship with Jemima proves to be. But even as her uncle fortifies Maria's individualism, he inadvertently arouses in her a highly detrimental and excessive sensibility. When the uncle returns from his travels and Maria resumes her relationship with him, his renewed efforts at schooling his now older charge backfire. Maria writes that in attempting to

prove to me that nothing which deserved the name of love or friendship, existed in the world, he drew such animated pictures of his own feelings, rendered permanent by disappointment, as imprinted the sentiments strongly on my heart, and animated my imagination. These remarks are necessary to elucidate some peculiarities in my character, which by the world are indefinitely termed romantic. (WW 97)

Having lost at love himself, the uncle tries to teach Maria about romantic disappointment, but instead of shattering her sentimental illusions, his discourse awakens the ill-educated Maria's romantic imagination. It is precisely this romantic sensibility as aroused by the uncle's story that leads Maria to commit her first fateful error; she projects her romantic sentiments onto her future husband, George Venables, entirely obscuring his libertinism and his desire for her uncle's fortune (WW 98). As Gary Kelly aptly explains, Maria's inadequate education leaves her "susceptible to seduction by the courtly social other and to being used as a means of transferring property from one man to another" (*Revolutionary Feminism* 214).



Significantly, Maria's faulty education allows not only the shameless Venables, but also the supposedly compassionate Darnford to exploit her emotional excess. Imprisoned in a madhouse by her husband, Maria once again falls in love, this time with the seemingly sensitive, caring Henry Darnford. Even before the reader learns that Darnford, like Venables, is not quite what he seems, it becomes obvious that Maria is, in Mary Poovey's words, "once more seduced by sentiment" (*Proper Lady* 99). Poovey explains that Maria projects her feelings onto Darnford long before she meets him, romanticizing her fellow prisoner from his scrawlings in the margins of the books he lends her (Rousseau's sentimental *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, in particular), and from her occasional glimpses of him through the bars in her prison window. Soon she acquiesces to him sexually, calling him "by the sacred name of 'husband'" (*WW* 139). Poovey finds this second seduction of Maria by the heroine's own romantic imagination evidence of a central problem in the narrative. Poovey suggests that neither Wollstonecraft nor the ambivalent narrator makes it clear how the reader should take Maria: whether she is the victim of Wollstonecraft's irony because of the heroine's failure to learn from her sentimental mistakes, and whether that irony extends to Maria's insights about marriage (*Proper Lady* 103). However, Janet Todd's assessment seems more to the point. Todd contends that in *The Wrongs of Woman* Wollstonecraft considers the darkest implications of Locke's environmental psychology, "that if environment is supreme in influence, then some people are irreparably damaged" (Introduction xxi). In fact, rather than rendering Maria the target of Wollstonecraft's irony, the heroine's repeated sentimental errors articulate the persistence of the ill effects of a bad education, the difficulty, perhaps impossibility, of overcoming inadequate schooling.

If Maria is nearly destroyed by her lack of worldly, rational experience and her excessive romantic sensibility, her jailor, Jemima, is the heroine's exact opposite. Betrayed and raped by men, forced into a path of poverty, prostitution, and servitude, Jemima leads a life of despair and torture. Eleanor Ty describes Jemima as "condemned to the world of bodily and instinctual drives" by a

childhood bereft of affection and education (39). However, Jemima is not totally without intellectual schooling. When Maria and Jemima first meet, Maria sees that her jailor is “superior to her class” (*WW* 63), and when Jemima finally tells her life story, the working woman reveals the source of her superiority. Taken in by a “literary man” after years of poverty and suffering (*WW* 87), Jemima begins “to read, to beguile the tediousness of solitude, and to gratify an inquisitive, active mind” (*WW* 86). She is allowed to listen to conversations between her employer and his literary friends, to discuss with the older man the subjects upon which he writes, and as a result of such rational discussion she begins to acquire “new principles” (*WW* 86) and to develop an affection for literature (*WW* 87). Although her mentor soon dies, he leaves her with “a taste for the rational . . . the virtuous enjoyments in life” (*WW* 89). Because she “could not now cease to reason” (*WW* 90), the debauchery to which she has been forced to sink becomes, ironically, even “more painful” (*WW* 86). Although her employer is an old, sentimental libertine, he nevertheless introduces her to reason and, through such rational exercise, the desire for virtue.

When Maria meets Jemima, therefore, the jailor lacks not the capacity to reason, but the ability to feel. Jemima explains that from her earliest youth, never were “the feminine caresses which seem a part of the rearing of a child, ever bestowed on me” (*WW* 80). Never treated with benevolence or compassion, always rejected as a slave or outcast, Jemima finds that even as her reason develops she still “hated mankind” (*WW* 90). In meeting Maria, however, Jemima feels “for once in her life, treated like a fellow-creature” (*WW* 79). Maria, with her highly developed sensitivity, stirs long-dormant feelings in Jemima. The narrator explains that although Maria

failed immediately to rouse a lively sense of injustice in the mind of her guard, because it had been sophisticated into misanthropy, she touched her heart . . . when told that her child, only four months old, had been torn from her, even while she was discharging the tenderest maternal office, the woman awoke in a bosom long estranged from feminine emotions, and Jemima determined to alleviate all in her power, without hazarding the loss of her place, the sufferings of a wretched mother, apparently injured, and certainly unhappy. (*WW* 64)

Maria appeals not to Jemima's mind, but to her heart, and through an intersubjective relationship recovers Jemima's feminine, maternal feelings. Through Jemima, Wollstonecraft affirms that rationality devoid of feeling destroys community.

Maria and Jemima, then, the middle- and working-class woman, represent two sides of the same educational coin. As in the *Vindication*, Wollstonecraft stresses the need for balance in women's education, for a reconciliation of masculine reason and positive feminine attributes, but here she represents her argument by dramatizing the disastrous effects of an education which is unbalanced in either direction, which is too feminine or, significantly, purely masculine. Maria's inadequate schooling leaves her with too much feminine feeling and not enough worldly rationality. Jemima's haphazard tutelage at the hands of her libertine employer, on the other hand, develops her masculine powers of reason but not any feminine sensitivity. Both women, as a result, suffer the consequences of their faulty educations in a world which exploits any female weakness.

Once again, however, Wollstonecraft does not extend this mature notion of education and gender reconstruction to include men. Rather than challenging male gender representations in a constructive manner, she presents the reader with two more negatively feminized males in Maria's two "husbands." Although Venables, with his libertine ways, his dissipated lifestyle, his worship of property, is clearly the kind of rake Wollstonecraft attacks in the *Vindication* as feminized by his wealthy birth, Darnford is a more complicated figure. Kind and generous to Maria in the asylum, a man of apparent benevolence and republican principles, Darnford is nonetheless a feminized male not so unlike the detested Venables.

To begin with, when the reader first meets Darnford he is feminized by his temporary position in a private madhouse. He is reduced to wooing Maria through disjointed scribblings in the books he lends her, forced like a woman to the textual margins in order to express himself; ironically, Wollstonecraft makes literal the metaphor of feminine literary repression through Maria's male lover.

But Darnford's marginalization is not only textual; it is also social. Darnford is confined to an asylum where, in his own words, "the privilege of man is denied me" (WW 72). Like Maria, Darnford is imprisoned by a man who desires his inheritance (WW 140), and thus stripped of his manly power, Darnford is impotent, unable to offer Maria any form of protection. He finds himself confined to the feminized world of the madhouse where rules of logic, of convention, and of society do not apply. What seems all right in such an artificial environment is not so in the world beyond; the positive heterosexual affections and domesticity Maria and Darnford share in the isolated, feminized realm do not translate into the sphere beyond the prison gates, into the real world of patriarchal relations. As a result, any positive consequences of Darnford's feminization in this madhouse are lost upon his return to British society.

More significantly, over the long term Darnford is feminized not so much by his temporary incarceration as by his social position. Darnford is born to "people of fashion" (WW 74). In telling his own tale he explains that upon the death of his parents, he was looked after by guardians until he was sent to Eton, so that "I never knew the sweets of domestic affection, but I felt the want of indulgence and frivolous respect at school" (WW 74). In short, Darnford received the dissipated, boarding school education Wollstonecraft attacks in the *Vindication*. As a child of fashion, devoid of domestic affection and its product, a sense of civic responsibility, Darnford became a libertine, enjoying a "life of pleasure" (WW 75) until, his money almost gone, he bought a commission in a regiment bound for America. Of the two forms of feminized males Wollstonecraft identifies in the *Vindication*, then, the dissipated gentry and the soldier, Darnford, Maria's would-be savior, is both.

Yet Claudia Johnson claims that Darnford represents the republican masculinity that Wollstonecraft advocates so powerfully in the *Vindication*, suggesting that his fecklessness represents Wollstonecraft's emerging disenchantment with this ideal (*Equivocal Beings* 59), her realization that even the republican man is "contaminated" by the "poison of sentimentality"

(*Equivocal Beings* 16). Certainly, while a prisoner in the United States Darnford reads many books which lead to claims of a change in his politics (*WW* 75), and his marginalized scribblings clearly indicate his ability to spout republican rhetoric (*WW* 68), but this revolutionary sensibility proves to be not a sincere political commitment, but rather simply another entertaining diversion, another plaything for the spoiled child of fashion. Indeed, Darnford's supposed republicanism is apparent only within the confines of the feminized madhouse; once he returns to the patriarchal world, the would-be hero does not behave in a very republican manner. When he gains his freedom, Darnford, using Maria's money, takes a trip in order to secure his inheritance, leaving her to face a trial for adultery and seduction and proving that his priorities still revolve around property and wealth. Other than his marginal writings and his own account of his life as told in the madhouse, Darnford offers no evidence of his supposed republican principles. Instead, both before and after his incarceration Darnford's actions tell the tale of a man of wealth and pleasure. Thus, far from being a representative of republican masculinity, Darnford is another of Wollstonecraft's negatively feminized males.

In the case of the novel, this failure to envision the possibility of a positively feminized male disrupts any attempt at resolution. Clearly, the six different suggestions for plot continuations plus the sketch of the conclusion (all of which confirm Darnford's lack of character) suggest that Wollstonecraft was experiencing some difficulty in envisioning a practical solution to the concerns she had raised (Ty 43-44). Of these many suggestions for the novel's closure, the most hopeful and the most complete is the sketch presented before Godwin's final editorial comments (*WW* 147-48). In this passage the solitary Maria prepares to kill herself until Jemima enters with Maria's daughter, who had been hidden away by Venables and Maria's brother. At the sound of her daughter's voice calling her "Mamma," Maria decides to live (*WW* 147-48). As Kelly explains, this sketch leaves the reader with an image of "a liberated and enlightened woman from the margin between the

professional and gentry classes, with her enlightened and emancipated voluntary woman servant, and her rescued and educable daughter, abandoned by law and man but united and ready to go on” (*English Fiction* 42). *The Wrongs of Woman* thus concludes with a vision of female community.

On one hand, this attempt at resolution proves radically transgressive in its subversion of patriarchal notions of female rivalry as well as heterosexual domesticity and maternity. The novel, with its depictions of females acting as each other’s jailors, of women unable to help other women for fear of male retribution, of female jealousy over other women’s superficial moments of privilege in an oppressive environment, powerfully demonstrates how “patriarchy uses women against each other” (Kelly, *Revolutionary Feminism* 218). This final vision of female inclusiveness, therefore, not only subverts this patriarchal notion of female rivalry, but also, as Johnson contends, undoes orthodox domesticity by privileging female fellowship as a more advanced version of motherhood than Wollstonecraft had previously envisioned. Johnson suggests that Wollstonecraft supplants the “fantasy of heterosexual domesticity” with co-maternity, so that “the emancipated, sturdy, purposive, mutually respecting, and rationally loving couple Wollstonecraft spent her career imagining is, finally, a female couple” (*Equivocal Beings* 69). Indeed, Wollstonecraft’s concluding sketch reconstructs maternity as community by presenting Maria and Jemima as two mothers for Maria’s young daughter.

However, although Johnson is correct in her recognition that in *The Wrongs of Woman* Wollstonecraft embraces the notion of female homosociality which the eighteenth-century writer had forcefully rejected in the *Vindication* (*Equivocal Beings* 48), the novel’s feminist resolution involves at least two practical difficulties. First, the community Wollstonecraft constructs at the novel’s close may be composed of same-sex members, but it is still marked by class differences. Although Rhonda Batchelor claims that Maria and Jemima develop a “class-transcendent relationship” because of their “common feminine experiences” (351), their association outside the prison remains based on class

distinctions. Certainly, Jemima chooses of her free will to stay with Maria upon their return to society, but Jemima insists “on being considered as [Maria’s] house-keeper, and to receive the customary stipend. On no other terms would she remain with her friend” (*WW* 140). Once back in the society beyond the prison, the world-wise Jemima, in a practical and Wollstonecraftian move, takes steps to ensure her economic independence; she is not about to sacrifice her security to the illusion of a classless female community. Jemima is thus Maria’s employee as much as her friend, and this continuing class division qualifies any sense of utopian community and republican equality informing the novel’s sense of closure.

More importantly, Wollstonecraft’s most thorough attempt at resolving the issues she raises in the novel depends upon the complete absence of men. The female community she envisions, the enclosed triangle of Maria, her daughter, and Jemima, implies a romantic withdrawal from, not a reworking of, patriarchal society. Because this sense of female community eradicates men from the utopian equation, this attempt at resolution is not workable in the world beyond the text, a world predicated on the existence of two sexes. Kelly suggests that “this social unit [is] probably meant to be socially pre-figurative” (*English Fiction* 42); if so, Wollstonecraft offers no vision of men in the social future and no disruption of the separation of the domestic and the public realms. Consequently, Wollstonecraft’s bourgeois-based refusal to deconstruct the sex-gender association as it defines men, her unwillingness to conceive of the possibility of a positively feminized male, undermines the novel’s efforts at resolution. Attempting to alter only one half of a binary pair, reconstructing gender for women only, means that these women have to withdraw from society in order to maintain their transformation and protect themselves against continued oppression and reversion to the status quo. In this manner, *The Wrongs of Woman* demonstrates that Wollstonecraft’s reluctance to reconstruct gender formations as they define the eighteenth-century male marks the limitations and inhibits the efficacy of her feminist proposals.

However, identifying any such liabilities in Wollstonecraft's argument should in no way detract from recognition of the impressiveness of this revolutionary writer's achievements, her legacy in terms of her revolutionary writing style and language, her feminization of genres, her use of didacticism, personal example, and imagined community (see note 7). To suggest that Wollstonecraft's views on women and education prove historically influential seems grossly understated. The educational reforms and gender reconstructions she proposes for the late eighteenth-century woman are nothing short of profound. In her efforts to deconstruct the gender text of late eighteenth-century British culture through pedagogical reform, Wollstonecraft reworks the terms of the educational debate that was raging at the turn of the century, creating new possibilities as well as new obstacles for the writers who follow. Of the many women writers influenced by Wollstonecraft's work, Eliza Fenwick and Mary Hays demonstrate the most direct connection, their novels both embracing and challenging Wollstonecraft's views on women and education.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> I wish to acknowledge Orrin Wang who also sees Wollstonecraft's project in deconstructive terms. In "The Other Reasons: Female Alterity and Enlightenment Discourse in Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*," Wang claims that "By having the feminine and the masculine occupy, at different strategic moments, the key position of both her negative critique and utopian polemic, Wollstonecraft is, in effect, deconstructing the intrinsic identity of a gendered subject" (134). Wang argues that Wollstonecraft disrupts notions of stability and determinacy through her manipulation of linguistic and social gendered categories. However, I wish to go one step further in order to argue that Wollstonecraft, having revealed the subject's constructedness, moves past the radical indeterminacy asserted by Wang to present an alternative construction, a third term that seeks to propel women beyond the binary opposition of traditional gender constructions.

<sup>2</sup> In all subsequent parenthetical references to Wollstonecraft's works, I will use the following abbreviations: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (VRW); *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (VRM); *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters* (*Thoughts*); *A Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark* (SR); *The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria* (WW).

<sup>3</sup> Many critics examine, in some form, the opposition identified by Kaplan. To name a few, Yaeger concurs with Kaplan's assessment of Wollstonecraft, citing the Enlightenment influence as responsible for Wollstonecraft's rejection of feeling in favor of reason (150). Sunstein (202) and Tomalin (107) discuss the sexual implications of this equation, exploring Wollstonecraft's uneasiness concerning passion, which they and Kaplan associate with feeling. Others attempt to qualify such assessments. Wilson suggests that Wollstonecraft rejects false or constructed emotion rather than emotion in general (89); Brody holds that Wollstonecraft rejects sensuality rather than feeling ("Mary Wollstonecraft" 57); and Vlasopolos focuses on Wollstonecraft's writing style to suggest that the eighteenth-century writer represses rather than rejects emotion as a strategy to gain credibility (462-70). The more recent trend is to assert Wollstonecraft's attempt to reconcile passion and reason. In *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, Poovey argues that Wollstonecraft's efforts to harmonize female feeling and intellectual independence (111) are complicated by her ambivalence toward feeling (49), her desire for domestic affections but her distrust of their unreliability (51). Wardle contends that Wollstonecraft seeks a balance between reason and feeling, rejecting neither (167-68); Grimshaw argues that the difficulty in combining sexuality and emotion with rationality defines Wollstonecraft's life and career (18); and Karen Green claims that Wollstonecraft unites an ethic of justice with an ethic of care (391-99). In two of the clearest and most persuasive assessments of this debate, Orrin Wang suggests that Wollstonecraft criticizes not passion itself, but rather the repression of passion (137), since reason is found in passion (144); and Virginia Sapiro argues that regulated passions, according to the *Vindication*, should be the useful companions of reason (61), because reason needs feeling and passion to provide the motivation to engage in life's experiences that lead to knowledge (62). Indeed, in the first page of her argument Wollstonecraft writes that by "struggling" with, not by denying or repressing, the passions, man "might attain a degree of knowledge denied to the brutes" (VRW 91). Only "when sensibility is nurtured at the expense of the understanding" (VRW 181) does Wollstonecraft recoil. Clearly, whatever position they take, many critics continue to respond to the notions of reason and passion as explored in the *Vindication*.

<sup>4</sup> In fact, Karen Green points out that many recent feminist critics accuse Wollstonecraft of being "masculinist," suggesting that because she is "egalitarian and interested in rights," she, like other liberal feminists, is grounded in a "male point of view" (386). Green attempts to disprove this

accusation through philosophical analysis.

<sup>5</sup> Wollstonecraft reacts against what she sees as Dr. Johnson's definition of sensibility as "Quickness of sensation, quickness of perception, delicacy'" (VRW 156), suggesting that true sensibility connotes lasting affection (VRW 160). She goes on to argue that women should turn such sensibility to the interests of "the broad channel of humanity" rather than, as is the conventional case, to one man (VRW 302).

For a more rigorous discussion of Wollstonecraft's revision of sensibility, see Sydney Conger, Virginia Sapiro, and G.J. Barker-Benfield (*Culture of Sensibility*). Sapiro contends that Wollstonecraft differentiates between sensibility governed by reason and sensualism (64-65), and Barker-Benfield argues that Wollstonecraft places a high value on fine sensibility as modified by reason because it puts one in touch with the sublime (281). Conger claims that Wollstonecraft cultivates sensibility yet struggles "to correct its theoretical and practical vulnerabilities as an ethic" (xxix), her discourse evolving over the course of her literary career from statements of faith in sensibility, as in *Thoughts*, for example (114), to demystification and exposition of its negative effects in the *Vindication* (115-16), to its rehabilitation in a form compatible with her political beliefs in *The Wrongs of Woman* (179).

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Mitzi Myers points out that "Wollstonecraft has recently been faulted as a feminist theorist for failing to challenge the nuclear family as an institution or to question its constraints on female life" ("Reform or Ruin" 207).

<sup>7</sup> Not insignificantly, as testament to Wollstonecraft's degree of literary artistry, the attempt at reconciling the feminine and masculine extends to her use of style and genre as well. Gary Kelly presents a detailed and useful analysis of Wollstonecraft's literary expertise in *Revolutionary Feminism*, claiming that Wollstonecraft was of necessity "a relentless experimenter in form and style, contesting the order of discourse in her time because she saw it as reproducing an oppressive social order. But as a consequence of this experimenting her writing was widely perceived in her time and since as simply 'bad'—incoherent, unlearned, inartistic and ineffective" (227). Indeed, the *Vindication* has long been criticized for its digressions, its often circular, associative, and repetitive rather than formal, linear argument. But I agree with Kelly. Wollstonecraft's writing style indicates a political strategy rather than a lapse in ability in that she attempts to challenge conventional perceptions of genres as gendered discourses by investing "masculine" forms with "feminine" literary devices (e.g. VRW) or vice versa (e.g. WW—this supposedly sentimental novel offers a significant degree of social commentary). I would suggest that this revolutionary style works most convincingly and most gracefully in her *Short Residence* because of the mixed genre; as Kelly explains, the travelogue was "situated between the formal and learned and the personal and familiar" (*Revolutionary Feminism* 177), that is, between the masculine and feminine. In the Advertisement to this work Wollstonecraft makes an overt claim to write according to both her "mind and feelings" (SR 62), and in this travelogue, she moves easily and smoothly back and forth between personal reflection and reasoned analysis, between social criticism, philosophical discourse, and sentimental digressions. Through this type of Spivakian movement, Wollstonecraft deconstructs gender ideology as it informs literary discourse as well as political reality.

## Chapter Four: Eliza Fenwick, Mary Hays, and New Directions

The strong feelings, and strong energies, which properly directed, in a field sufficiently wide, might—ah! what might they not have aided? forced back, and pent up, ravage and destroy the mind which gave them birth!

Mary Hays, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney* (1796)

In the 1790s Eliza Fenwick and Mary Hays were closely associated with the radical Godwin circle, and as indicated by the book of letters published by Hays's great-great-niece, Annie Wedd, the two eighteenth-century women writers remained friends and correspondents throughout their lives. Both Fenwick's *Secresy; or, The Ruin on the Rock* and Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, published in 1795 and 1796 respectively, indicate a clear association with the revolutionary politics and radical thought prevalent in the Jacobin ideology of the revolutionary decade. More significantly, both texts reveal a strong influence from the pedagogical and feminist writings of Mary Wollstonecraft.<sup>1</sup> Each novel delves into the contemporary issue of women's education, struggling against dominant perceptions and practices in the attempt to free women from political and cultural restraints through educational and gender reform. However, neither text merely parrots the positions and proposals of the authors' female friend and feminist mentor. Rather, Fenwick and Hays take their political and literary inheritance from Wollstonecraft and challenge its implications and limitations, reconfiguring, renegotiating, and extending the polemicist's feminism in order to

construct their own radical responses to conventional educational practices and gender ideology.

Fenwick's *Secresy* in particular demonstrates a close connection to Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. That Fenwick was a radical is immediately confirmed in the title page of the novel when the writer claims authorship "By a Woman" rather than a "Lady," and in the dedication when Fenwick overtly asserts her ambitious, hence unfeminine, desire that her novel be "IMMORTAL" (37) (Grundy, Introduction 7). Despite such hopes for lasting literary recognition, however, *Secresy* remains Fenwick's only known novel intended for an adult readership. Married to John Fenwick, the famous radical editor and political idealist whose alcoholism continually courted familial poverty, Eliza's time was spent supporting her children as a librarian, schoolmistress, private governess, and writer of children's literature. As editor of the recent edition of the novel, Isobel Grundy suggests that the consequent "absence of an *oeuvre*" by Fenwick helps account for the dearth of critical attention the novel has received in the contemporary academic arena (Introduction 25). Indeed, both Gary Kelly and Cheryl Turner, as Grundy points out, mention the novel briefly (Introduction 34), and certainly Dale Spender includes *Secresy* in her list of significant but now ignored women's fiction of the period,<sup>2</sup> but besides these and a few other hasty critical discussions (most of them by Grundy), the novel remains largely unstudied. In fact, Grundy's 1994 edition of the novel met with extreme resistance if not hostility by Terry Castle, whose review of the publication chastises the novel's "excruciating" badness, condescendingly suggesting that *Secresy* merits reading only because its "awfulness" serves as an historical indication of "the imaginative and stylistic tics deforming so much early English women's fiction" (18). It would seem, as Rhoda Zuk poignantly expresses in her subsequent review of the edition, that "the tiresome necessity remains of defending the project of uncovering, contextualizing, and theorizing eighteenth-century women's texts" (489).

Nevertheless, despite Castle's cavalier dismissal of the novel, I read *Secresy* as a disruptive,

intricate, challenging text which casts new light on the educational and gender debates being waged at the end of the eighteenth century by re-interpreting Wollstonecraft's revolutionary feminism. In her editorial introduction to the rarely studied novel, Grundy identifies an intertextual relationship between Fenwick's novel and Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*, suggesting that "Wollstonecraft's rebuttal of Rousseau in her *Vindication* is a major influence on *Secresy*" (Introduction 26). First printed in 1795, three years after the publication of Wollstonecraft's feminist manifesto (and two years prior to *The Wrongs of Woman*), *Secresy* clearly shares many of the *Vindication*'s concerns regarding women's education and social reform; Fenwick offers two similarly intelligent, sensible heroines who because of their different educations experience vastly dissimilar fates. Through such pedagogical analysis, *Secresy* participates to a rather striking degree in the Wollstonecraftian paradigm of gender formations as outlined in the previous chapter by affirming the necessity of women's access to masculinity in the form of a rational education while simultaneously revalorizing the feminine, that is, by deconstructing the dominant gender ideology as it informs the late eighteenth-century woman.

However, Fenwick's novel is by no means simply a restatement in fictional form of Wollstonecraft's arguments. On the contrary, *Secresy* reworks the *Vindication*'s gender constructions in order to increase the possibility of resisting dominant eighteenth-century patriarchal prescriptions, most noticeably in its construction of women beyond the limits of bourgeois motherhood and in the ambiguity inserted into gender representations of the late eighteenth-century male. Most importantly, Fenwick attempts to redefine class relations as she realigns gender constructions, and this revised class consciousness produces new insights which reach beyond Wollstonecraft's bourgeois bias. As a result, although *Secresy* generally subscribes to the *Vindication*'s feminist project, reflecting Wollstonecraft's liberal resistance to as well as silent complicity with eighteenth-century gender representations, Fenwick's unique approach to the issue

of women's education expands the disruptive potential of Wollstonecraftian gender constructions.

Specifically, Fenwick increases the radical opportunity of the *Vindication's* gender representations by redefining Wollstonecraft's bourgeois notion of aristocracy. In her introduction to the *Vindication* Wollstonecraft isolates middle-class women as representatives of her reformist hopes for the female sex, "because they appear to be in the most natural state" (81). As a revolutionary thinker Wollstonecraft's complete rejection of the upper classes is unmistakable. She says,

From the respect paid to property flow, as from a poisoned fountain, most of the evils and vices which render this world such a dreary scene to the contemplative mind. For it is in the most polished society that noisome reptiles and venomous serpents lurk under the rank herbage; and there is voluptuousness pampered by the still sultry air, which relaxes every good disposition before it ripens into virtue. . . what but habitual idleness can hereditary wealth and title produce? (*VRW* 257)

In this passage Wollstonecraft draws no clear distinction between inherited rank and inherited riches, suggesting that both forms of patrilineal social distinction derive from the worship of property, and property is, according to her 1796 *Short Residence*, "the root of all evil" (170). In this latter work Wollstonecraft's increased knowledge of the bourgeois world of commerce (largely through her experience with Gilbert Imlay) leads her to conclude that "the tyranny of wealth is still more galling and debasing than that of rank" (*SR* 150), a statement suggesting that the writer grows more discerning in her assessment of middle-class consumer culture. Nevertheless, in both works Wollstonecraft idealizes the professional middle classes as the source of social progress.<sup>3</sup> To this eighteenth-century writer, therefore, the upper-class lady, representative of two false systems of value, class and sex (Ferguson and Todd 69), is so dissipated by wealth and rank that even a rational education could not redeem her (Brody, Introduction 38). At the opposite end of the social spectrum, the working-class woman, although the recipient of Wollstonecraft's sympathy, is too stupefied by hard work to be able to rise above her environment (Brody, Introduction 38-39). Thus, Wollstonecraft turns to the women of the professional bourgeois classes, middle-class females who

are inhibited by neither dissipated idleness nor excessive labor, as the most capable of effecting change through educational reform.

*Secresy*, however, presents a different class perspective. Fenwick creates several middle-class characters—Mrs. Beville and the “too honest” (312) Farmer Richardson in particular—and although they are granted positive representation, they are minor and largely functional. For the most part, Fenwick focusses on the gentry, and she rethinks the notion of privilege through one of her two central female characters, Caroline Ashburn. Whereas Wollstonecraft links hereditary riches and rank, growing increasingly critical of individual wealth, Fenwick clearly distinguishes between privileges of title and money in order to revalorize the newly wealthy classes. Surrounded by people with feudal money—George and Sibella Valmont, Clement Montgomery—and/or inherited titles—Lord, Lady Mary, and Lady Laura Bowden, the Earl of Elsings, Lord Filmar, Sir Thomas Barlowe—Caroline inherits wealth without title, money earned from trade rather than land. On the one hand, this trade wealth proves problematic since it derives from West Indies colonialism; that Caroline’s inheritance may derive from slavery, since her father (as well as Arthur Murden’s uncle, Sir Thomas Barlowe) gained his wealth as a nabob in India, creates an unresolved tension in the novel. Although at one point Caroline states, “I still wish to know the employments of my father’s life: for it is possible there may be some retribution to make to individuals” (109), she does not follow through on her promise to investigate the source of her wealth and make appropriate restitution. Grundy is correct to assert that “colonial evil has to be separately dramatised in the episode of the Indian woman” (Introduction 28). This colonial element thus suggests that Caroline’s trade money is marked with the stain of racism, but because Fenwick withdraws from the issue, the significance of colonial trade to the novel’s class structure and moral position remains unclear.<sup>4</sup> In terms of class, however, this trade wealth clearly frees Caroline from the taint of feudalism. As the inheritor of new money and not blue blood, Caroline is rendered neither useless nor idle; on the

contrary, she acts as a productive, benevolent force of reform in the text, encouraging others to contribute to society and reclaiming those of wealth and even title from their dissipation. By renegotiating distinctions of privilege, Fenwick attempts to rewrite the leisured classes meritocratically, and this redefinition allows her more freedom in her simultaneous reconstruction of gender formations.

From the outset, Fenwick clearly participates in Wollstonecraft's overt pedagogical project, exploring women's need for a rational, masculine education. Fenwick creates two potential heroines, Sibella and Caroline, whose friendship is revealed in epistolary form. Although well-born, these women gesture toward Wollstonecraft's ideal since they are the two most masculine characters in the novel; both are rational, resolute, and strong. Because Sibella, however, is raised in a secluded castle and spends her time running in the woods with her fawn, romantic nuances inform her representation. Yet Sibella is no orthodox romantic heroine; far from the weak-minded, fragile female of sentimental tradition, she is a woman of intelligence, a woman "born to think" (43). Sibella proves her strength and resolve when she is kidnapped by Lord Filmar. Describing her reaction in a letter to his friend, Filmar states,

And now what a list of sobs, tears, screams, prayers, and lamentations you expect! I have not one for you. She sighed, indeed, and a few drops forced a reluctant way; but she neither prayed, threatened, nor lamented. She demanded her liberty. She reasoned for her liberty; reasoned with a firmness collected, vigilant, manly, let me say. (332)

As when confronted by Arthur in the form of a ghost, Sibella reacts not as an emotional, delicate creature, but as a woman of "manly" reason and resolve.

Nevertheless, despite her strong mind and natural intellect, Sibella seals her fate with a wrong choice; she sacrifices her virtue for the love of an unworthy man, Clement Montgomery, her only childhood playmate. This error in judgement is, as Caroline insistently points out, a direct product of Sibella's poor education, a tutelage governed by Sibella's uncle and the novel's gothic



villain, George Valmont. In one of her letters to her new friend, Caroline asks Sibella, “how comes it, I say, that you possess the comprehensive powers of intellect?” (65). Sibella explains that for a time Clement’s tutor allowed her to listen to his instructions, to partake of a classical, rational education (58). This tutor, Sibella elaborates, “called forth the powers of my mind from chaos,” nurturing her “expanding faculties,” making her “feel within the vivifying principle of intellectual life” (74).<sup>5</sup> However, when this Bonneville dies, the new tutor obeys Valmont and refuses to include Sibella in his lessons so that the young girl is “abandoned of guide” (76). Although Sibella insists that she “will think” (43) since all creatures, even the insects and the flowers, “possess the powers of thought” (44), her education is left to the control of Valmont, the inconsistent, contrary, feudal worshipper of rank and patrilineage (62-63).

Valmont is an extreme form of Wollstonecraft’s aristocratic tyrant; beyond being useless to society, he is a dedicated misanthrope. Yet as Grundy explains, Valmont merely rejects the surface features of social existence, retaining a belief in its patriarchal structures (Introduction 25), and his treatment of Sibella confirms his traditional bias. In exaggerated Rousseauvian fashion, Valmont raises Sibella in “extraordinary seclusion” and worldly ignorance as a child of nature (55); indeed, the lone girl associates with only two servants in Valmont’s isolated castle, and of these two, one seems devoid of hearing and the other of speech, Andrew being “almost inflexible in silence” (77). Valmont explains of his niece that he has “purposefully educated her to be the tractable and obedient companion of a husband,” (182) his bastard son, Clement, in order to bury “the disgrace” of Clement’s birth in the “nobleness of [Valmont’s] possessions” (309). That is, Valmont raises Sibella to be the docile, obedient, and dependent means by which property can be legitimately transferred between generations of men. While Fenwick presents many conventionally feminized ladies in the text—for example, Caroline’s mother, Mrs. Ashburn, the cunning, self-centred, aging lady of fashion; Lady Mary Bowden, the shallow, deceptive, typical coquette; Mrs. Valmont, the mindless,

hypochondriacal, submissive wife who Caroline thinks is likely to die of “inanity” (305)—Sibella suffers most from her customary feminine education. In fact, as Grundy asserts, her “unusually secluded upbringing is presented as an actual moral wrong done to her” (“novel” 233). Raised for a man rather than for the world, denied the opportunity to develop her innate rational capacities and gain worldly experience, Sibella idealizes the only man she knows, Clement, chooses to follow the dictates of her heart rather than society, and finds herself with an illegitimate pregnancy. Sibella aptly proves Wollstonecraft’s contention that a poor education inhibits a woman’s ability to be virtuous.

In contrast, Caroline, Sibella’s friend and advisor, makes no such error. Like Sibella, Caroline displays a strong rational capacity; she is wise, practical, calm, and astute. Also like her friend, Caroline is denied a formal education; born of “fashionable” parents, Miss Ashburn is spoiled by her indulgent father and neglected by her dissipated mother (46-47). However, unlike Sibella and in direct defiance of Rousseauvian precepts, the young Caroline educates herself through experience and observation of the world (66). When forced to terminate a friendship with a social inferior at the tender age of thirteen, Caroline learns “the true sense” of her situation (49), the moral responsibility of wealth and power and the necessity of seeing through mere appearances. With this early schooling in worldly knowledge, Caroline learns that independent thought is fundamental to the individual’s personal growth as well as social progress. Indeed, Caroline vehemently denies the value of filial obedience, claiming that

the mind, yielding itself to implicit unexamined obedience, loses its individual dignity, and you can expect no more of a man than of a brute. What is to become of the child who is taught never to think or act for himself? Can a creature thus formed ever arrive at the maturity of wisdom? How is he who has never reasoned [to] be enabled in his turn to train his offspring otherwise than he himself was trained? (349)

In a rather Wollstonecraftian manner, Caroline explains that the lack of independent reason renders the individual and, through him or her, society immature since one generation instructs the next. In

fact, Caroline often seems like Wollstonecraft's spokesperson in the book, consistently rebuking Valmont and his misguided educational ideas for Sibella's difficult situation (e.g. 40, 139, 194, 295, 302, 349). Allowed to develop her rational capacity, her masculine mind, rather than becoming the slave to obedience, Caroline rarely strays from virtue (secretly planning Sibella's escape from Valmont castle when the old patriarch keeps her prisoner is Caroline's only error, which she acknowledges as such).

Through this clear privileging of Caroline as the novel's moral centre, *Secresy* enacts Wollstonecraft's reversal of the dominant sex-gender equation, endorsing women's access to a masculine pedagogy. Fenwick demonstrates that a traditional feminine education renders women useless, like Mrs. Ashburn and Mrs. Valmont, or incapacitated, like Sibella, while Caroline serves as Wollstonecraft's model of a civic-minded woman who can become virtuous if allowed to exercise her rational, masculine abilities.

To carry the parallel further, Fenwick, like Wollstonecraft, also reconstructs femininity. Like the *Vindication*, *Secresy* exhibits a concerted effort to divest femininity of its negative connotations, to divorce women from conventionally negative feminine traits. Fenwick's title indicates the focus of this attack. Mainly through Caroline's voice, secrecy is associated with inconsistency, ignorance, deception, and insincerity, thereby recalling Wollstonecraft's discussions of cunning. Conventional eighteenth-century conduct books typically advised women to hide their wit, their learning, their health, and to flatter, to dissimulate, to manipulate men (Myers, "Reform or Ruin" 305) as a way of gaining power within the marriage (Brody, "Mary Wollstonecraft" 53). Both the *Vindication* and *Secresy* expose such guile to critical attack. All of the key characters in the novel hold secrets so that no one knows the whole truth until the story's tragic dénouement. Caroline, in repentance for her one lapse in judgement in master-minding Sibella's ill-fated secret escape, speaks the novel's moral by diagnosing deception as a sin "against reason and conviction" (325), a sentiment finally echoed

by Sibella from her deathbed when she asks Caroline to tell the world “to be sincere” (358). (Sibella says “the world” and not “women” because the men in the novel, most of whom are feminized by their aristocratic status, are as secretive and deceptive as the women.) In this manner, Fenwick clearly rejects, at least in part, dominant feminine constructions and implies that works like *Emile*, which promulgate such destructive notions of femininity, represent a perversion of education and ethics.

Moreover, Fenwick undertakes this distancing, like Wollstonecraft, in order to reconstruct femininity as positive, highlighting such attributes as benevolence, forgiveness, and sensibility. Like Wollstonecraft, Fenwick attempts to revalorize sensibility, a typically feminine trait, by exposing the significance of environmental influences. Caroline and Sibella are equally sensitive, but whereas Caroline’s sensibility derives from her rational education, from knowledge gathered by experiencing and observing the world, Sibella’s sensibility develops in private; it is natural. Speaking to Caroline, Sibella acknowledges, “You read the world: I, my own heart” (73), and her heart leads her to err. But Caroline’s sensibility, supported by worldly knowledge, grows into discernment, so that Fenwick revalorizes this feminine attribute as potentially productive in the proper context.

Because of *Secresy*’s innovative class consciousness, however, Fenwick goes much further in her attempt to reconstruct femininity than Wollstonecraft, becoming more experimental, more daring. Whereas Wollstonecraft depends solely on middle-class mothers to link the private and public spheres, Fenwick turns to Caroline, a childless, single, unattached woman of financial means; Caroline is not weighed down by the responsibilities of marriage and motherhood, by the necessities and restrictions of bourgeois patriarchy. Through Caroline, Fenwick offers a new vision of reconstructed femininity, a new way of taking the feminine to the mainstream. Fenwick brings Caroline to the public world not as a mother, but as a savior figure, a wealthy, independent woman who redeems others through the rational exercise of her benevolence, sincerity, and compassion, that

is, her positive feminine attributes.

Caroline evolves in the text from a traditional or faulty savior figure to a fully effective redemptive agent. Throughout the text she influences those around her, such as Arthur Murden who, struck by her goodness, casts her as his “monitress” (135). To Arthur, however, Caroline is merely a traditional female savior figure, passively exerting a positive influence over a man by serving as a virtuous example. With Sibella, Caroline assumes a more prominent and more complicated savior position, actively planning and organizing her friend’s escape from Valmont castle. Yet Caroline’s capacity in this context is severely qualified; unable to effect Sibella’s rescue herself, Caroline must rely on a male surrogate, Arthur, to put her plan into action. Furthermore, any attempt to construct Caroline as Sibella’s savior is problematized by the disturbing patriarchal overtones which come to determine this female friendship. In a seemingly reactionary turn, upon discovering the sexual nature of Sibella’s relationship with Clement, Caroline becomes Sibella’s judge rather than her friend and equal, adopting a patronizing, superior moral position. If Caroline’s friendship and companionate correspondence with Sibella, the mutual subjectivity exhibited in their letters, inspires the romantic Sibella’s increasing resistance to Valmont’s domination, any sense of empowerment turns to rebuke as Caroline chastises Sibella for the seriousness of her error (139). As Grundy explains, Caroline “complies, more or less, with convention” (Introduction 25), functioning here almost as a mouthpiece for dominant patriarchal ideology. Of course, Caroline assumes this repressive, condescending stance, silencing and subordinating Sibella, only when Sibella reveals herself a victim of her feminine education, when Sibella turns into the negative feminine creature Wollstonecraft attacks, so that Caroline’s judgement is directed more at the failed system of education than at the victim herself. Nevertheless, however one reads this new relationship between the two women, as a savior figure in this instance Caroline is largely ineffective and, as she later comes to realize, misguided.

In two other cases, however, Caroline comes to function as a highly empowered redemptive

agent. First, she redeems Henry Davenport. As a gentleman short on funds Davenport, to support the woman he loves and his illegitimate child, intends to marry Caroline's mother for the older woman's money.<sup>6</sup> Caroline, upon discovering this truth, convinces Davenport to overcome his "class-induced triviality and worthlessness" (Grundy, Introduction 28), his upper-class prejudice against work and join the professional bourgeois class. She begins by reasoning with him, by appealing to his better nature, forcing him "to listen to [her] patiently while [she] portrayed the evils of such a marriage, and the cruel injustice he was guilty of towards a woman so chosen" (145). To such argument she adds an offer to provide the poor gentleman with the money to obtain training in the profession of his choice. When Davenport finally concedes to a life of work, Caroline boldly concludes, "I saved Davenport" (165). Caroline reaches into the world, beyond the traditional woman's realm of husband and children, to help a well-born stranger become more useful to society, to accept his responsibility as a citizen.

Yet as a redemptive figure Caroline's efforts in this situation are somewhat tainted by her reliance on her wealth. Although Davenport chooses to go into business with his brother-in-law rather than enter a profession through Caroline's money, Miss Ashburn's attempt at redeeming this man depends on her finances; her service in this instance is a direct function of her leisure status. This is not the case with Lord Filmar. In many ways Filmar is a typical upper-class rake, in Zuk's term, a "salacious fortune hunter" (490). A man of inherited title, he, like Davenport, refuses to earn a living, and when in need of money to settle his gambling debts, Filmar abducts Sibella in order to force a marriage so that he can gain her inheritance. Yet this potential villain receives no punishment for his intended and partially realized crimes. Although Grundy, who aptly describes Filmar as a "welcome contrast" to the other characters "in his wit and flippancy," deems the scheming gentleman a "scapegoat for anger" who turns into a "credible penitent" (Introduction 30), Filmar does very little to expiate his sin. He merely returns Sibella and for entirely self-serving reasons; he discovers she

is already pregnant and, as a blueblood, Filmar cannot marry a woman whose bloodline is spoiled (340). He therefore has “no alternative” but to take her home, unless, as he explains in his usual humorous, ironic tone, “I shoot her and bury her under a tree” (340). Yet in the end Sibella pays his debts and Filmar goes free. Such a conclusion seems painfully contrived but instructively overdetermined.

However, several key factors lend a sense of legitimacy and satisfaction to Filmar’s happy ending. Besides Caroline, he is the most astute character in the book. Only Filmar (207) and Caroline (287) deduce that Clement’s disinheritance by Valmont is yet another part of the old patriarch’s plan to make Clement disdain society rather than a sincere attempt to force the young Montgomery into a profession. In a rather succinct manner Filmar also determines that “Miss Ashburn is an angel, Mr. Murden a fine fellow, Mr. Valmont an idiot, Sibella a saint, and Montgomery - a scoundrel” (339). Filmar sees clearly, and it is this discernment which permits Caroline to transform him. In the climactic episode, after Sibella loses her baby Filmar writes, “In such a moment, who could palliate? Not I indeed! I did not conceal from Miss Ashburn an atom of the truth; and she talked like an angel, for she not only told me I should amend but taught me how to amend” (347). Filmar confesses with complete sincerity to his “angel,” and Caroline, in turn, saves him not by giving him money (Sibella frees her of this task) or by serving as a passive, albeit virtuous, example; she saves Filmar by using her reason, by actively exercising her rational capacity to teach him through feminine compassion and forgiveness. As a fully active redemptive figure Caroline not only saves Filmar, but also teaches him how to save himself, writing her last letter to him so that he might learn through this experience (351-52), so that her lesson has potentially long-lasting effects. If, then, the ending appears contrived logically, it plays well thematically. Lord Filmar, as a “not incorrigible” (351) aristocrat of inherited title, is able to receive Caroline’s message, thereby representing the reformatory potential of the titled upper classes.

In this manner, like Wollstonecraft, Fenwick reconstructs the feminine, but Fenwick travels a more disruptive path. She takes the feminine to the public not by revaluing mother's labor, but by envisioning women's active transformative power, a power which derives from rationality and benevolence, masculinity and femininity. Like Wollstonecraft, Fenwick deconstructs the dominant late eighteenth-century sex-gender equation as it applies to women, reversing it by valorizing masculinized women and ultimately displacing it by offering women an alternative, a balanced construction of positively valued feminine and masculine traits and behaviors. Caroline is a woman of feeling and reason; although she loves Arthur, she would never die for unrequited love because she feels a social responsibility (284-85). Thus Fenwick, through Caroline, creates an alternative union of masculinity and revalorized femininity that reaches beyond the family, beyond motherhood, to present a reconciliation of the private and public through women's transformative agency in the social world.

Furthermore, because Caroline's gender construction approaches the *Vindication's* ideal of the reformed woman, or the rational female citizen, and because Caroline is of the leisured classes, her representation exposes the limitations inherent in Wollstonecraft's class bias. Fenwick makes room for difference in class relations where Wollstonecraft sees none, differentiating between gentry of merit and those of dissipation, and in doing so salvages as potentially reformable and redeemable an entire body of people Wollstonecraft automatically discards. Grundy's assessment, then, that "*Secresy* remains arguably a reformist rather than a revolutionary text" (Introduction 28) is accurate. Like her revolutionary contemporaries, Wollstonecraft seeks to overthrow the genteel classes, but Fenwick, although a political radical herself, suggests their redemption through redefinition. Indeed, Caroline may criticize the "infirmities" inherent in high birth (162), and she may rail against the luxury, pleasure, and "drudgery of dissipation" attendant upon her wealthy lifestyle (287), but rather than simply leave the shallow life of fashion, she remains because she "dare not proscribe [her] little



power of doing good” (287), because she can teach people like Davenport the moral and social value of work, civic responsibility, and bourgeois-based usefulness. Through Caroline, Fenwick forcefully exposes the limitations of rank and wealth, but she does so without global dismissal and without the kind of romantic withdrawal to which Wollstonecraft was soon to resort in *The Wrongs of Woman*. Ironically, it is this reformist rather than revolutionary attitude that renders Fenwick’s gender constructions more visionary, more disruptive than Wollstonecraft’s.

*Secresy*’s gender representations of the male characters in the novel, on the other hand, are not quite so innovative. Like Wollstonecraft, Fenwick does not directly explore masculinity but she does examine the feminine in men, and, once again, only in a largely negative sense. Most of the males in the text are examples of how, as Wollstonecraft claims, inherited wealth destructively feminizes the aristocracy. Davenport, Lord Filmar, the Earl of Elsings, and Clement are all feminized males, useless and weak, mercenary and idle. Of these fashionable men, Clement is the most exaggeratedly feminized male. Exploring the use of beauty in the novel, Grundy suggests that Clement functions “like the lovely temptresses of innumerable male narratives,” his physical beauty misleading the female hero (“Against Beauty” 85). Significantly, the source of his destructive feminization is, once again, his education; like Sibella, Clement is a victim of Valmont’s Rousseauvian ideas. Valmont hires the best tutors to teach his illegitimate son, yet Clement still grows up selfish, unchaste, idle, weak, and, according to Filmar, “unmanly” (299), preferring to kill himself rather than go to work or live in poverty (199). Despite his access to the best rational discourses, Clement is not allowed to develop his reason; as Caroline points out, he had “not . . . one lesson of independence of mind, without which he must ever be a tool and dependent” (350). Instead, Clement’s complete isolation and subjection to paternal authority, intended to inculcate in him a hatred of society, merely render him dependent and unprincipled. Referring to Clement, Filmar, and Arthur, Grundy asserts, “these men are alike in lacking the women’s strength of mind,

endurance in adversity, and interest in reforming society” (Introduction 29). This is the central reversal upon which the text is based; the two heroines are masculine while the men are feminine, and the men are rejected for this weakness.

Grundy’s recognition points to another, and perhaps the most intriguing, feminized male in the novel: Arthur Murden. If Clement is the most exaggerated in his feminization, Arthur is the most complicated. Like Clement, Arthur is, in the words of the trustworthy Farmer Richardson during the rescue of Sibella, “unmanned” (322). More specifically, Arthur explains his feminization by claiming, “My mind is my disease” (96); the young Murden lacks reason. Grundy aptly identifies Arthur as the target of Fenwick’s romantic satire (Introduction 29). Arthur is the sentimental idealist who falls desperately in love with Sibella long before he meets her because her description, as embellished by Caroline, fits his romantic ideal of the perfect female (258). Having already lost his senses once when Lord Filmar abducts Sibella, taking to his bed like a swooning coquette (334), Arthur becomes in the climactic scene the fragile, hysterical, fainting “heroine” while his romantic female counterpart, Sibella, reacts to her tragedy with manly dignity and emotional strength (352-55). This forceful, final reversal of sex roles confirms the excess of Arthur’s feminization.

Yet Arthur is neither mercenary, nor vain, nor unprincipled like the other feminized males in the text; despite his romantic idealism, he is rather like the novel’s respectable heroine, Caroline. Like Sibella, Arthur is, according to Caroline, the victim of an “erroneous” education (286). Although Fenwick does not provide much information concerning Arthur’s educational background, she does reveal that Arthur is the nephew and favorite of a baronet, Sir Thomas Barlowe, and that Arthur accompanies Clement on a Grand Tour of the continent (95), both facts suggestive of the kind of upper-class education Wollstonecraft criticizes in the *Vindication* for feminizing the gentry. But Arthur, despite his efforts, cannot find any happiness in this life of pleasure towards which he is educated, ironically envying Clement’s obvious delight in their travels (243). He explains to

Clement,

I had partaken of these pleasures without a particle of enjoyment. Frequenting the resort of dissipation from custom, labouring to compel my revolting senses to the gratifications of pleasure, struggling to wear a character opposite to my inclination, seeking in public to seduce the attentions of women, from whose hours of private yielding I fled with disgust, effectually removed from society which would have taught me the importance of mental pursuits, and living in the profusion of splendor, I almost prayed for wants, for a something, any thing, that could interrupt the routine of sameness, that could make me cease to be as it were the mere automaton of habit. (243)

Like Caroline, Arthur is highly disdainful of fashionable society with its useless monotony of vain pleasures, its lack of “mental pursuits.” Although he finds himself in the midst of this society from “custom,” Arthur does not behave like a typical man of pleasure. He will not respond to patriarchal authority with blind obedience, refusing to seduce Mrs. Ashburn for her money as his uncle requests (110), and he reacts to social misfortune with benevolence and generosity, using his position and wealth to help the less fortunate like Peggy and the old Indian woman. Indeed, Grundy asserts that “Montgomery’s incorrigible and Filmar’s corrigible vices contrast with Murden’s virtues” (Introduction 29); Arthur may be a feminized male, but he is not without social and moral merit.

Thus, in Arthur Fenwick creates a feminized male with integrity and value; however, she still does not go so far as to endorse Arthur’s femininity. The gender reversal embodied by Arthur is still met with criticism and, ultimately, rejection because, as Grundy puts it, “Male virtue . . . is squandered on being romantic instead of revolutionary” (Introduction 29). Although Arthur may help certain unfortunate individuals in specific circumstances, in a general sense he fails to fulfil his civic responsibility as a rational citizen. Caroline accuses him of being “vicious” because he wastes his life on frivolous, socially unproductive pursuits; she tells him to ask himself “If you have done service to human kind, or if you have not in fraud and secrecy bubbled away your happiness?” (284). Arthur spends almost all of his time in the novel lost in his romantic illusions, playing at being the hermit/ghost of the ruin on the rock. In the end his entire life proves to be wasted as he dies,

according to Caroline, of his “ungoverned passion” (357); his death is the direct result of his excessive and obviously destructive femininity. Like Wollstonecraft, therefore, Fenwick explores but ultimately rejects the feminized male, even in his most benevolent form, so that the reversal of the sex-gender equation for men is not accompanied by a displacement. *Secresy* offers no successful alternative gender construction for men and, consequently, implicitly reaffirms the existing bourgeois social order as it supports the late eighteenth-century male.

Yet the reformation of the two minor male characters feminized by wealth and title, Davenport and Lord Filmar, allows for a subtle sense of ambiguity in the text which implies, even if it fails to realize, a certain possibility not seen in the *Vindication*. As already demonstrated, Caroline reclaims these negatively feminized males through the reasonable application of her sincerity, her generosity, and her compassion, through the rational extension of her positive feminine attributes. Of course, Davenport and Filmar in their reformed state are unable to provide convincing or stable examples of an alternative male gender construct, of a revalorized femininity extended to men. Caroline frees Davenport of his feminine dependence by making him useful, but in the process he disappears from the novel. A similar silence follows Filmar; once he is reformed, the novel ends. His incorporation of masculinity and reconstructed femininity through Caroline’s influence remains only a projection. Although Davenport and Filmar are good examples of how a well-educated woman can actively exert a positive effect on men in the world, once this reformation is initiated Fenwick retreats. She makes no attempt to represent the reformed, balanced male in a social setting, so that his existence is posited but never realized. Nevertheless, although Fenwick is unable to enact this vision of male gender reformation, to represent this new construction without mystification and ambiguous silence, in principle at least she goes beyond Wollstonecraft by extending her notion of revalorized femininity to men and by hypothesizing, if not representing, a gender reconstruction for men at the turn of the century.

What *Secresy* offers, then, is a complex, suggestive reworking of the *Vindication*'s gender constructions. In general, both texts share similar concerns—women's education and social reform—and in terms of gender both begin and end in similar places. Through their pedagogical discussions both works endorse masculinized women, reconstruct femininity, and offer women an alternative to the dominant late eighteenth-century sex-gender equation by envisioning a balance of masculine and feminine virtues; neither text explores the masculine or successfully disrupts the sex-gender association for men. Yet despite these abundant similarities, Fenwick's redefinition of class structures significantly increases the disruptive potential of the kinds of gender and educational reforms outlined in the *Vindication*. Fenwick is more optimistic in her view of women's reform; she offers a vision of gender reconstruction, an alternative, which reaches beyond mere middle-class motherhood to grant women of merit redemptive social agency, opening her discourse to include the gentry in her revolutionary notion of civic progress. At the same time, she is more ambiguous concerning men; if she cannot present a realized vision of men's reconstruction, she certainly envisions a potential not seen in Wollstonecraft, effectively problematizing a class and gender situation the earlier writer ignores. Written by a woman mainly recognized as a children's author, *Secresy*'s complex construction of class and gender relations and its intertextual reworking of Mary Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* confirm its growing critical stature.

*Secresy* was followed the next year by Mary Hays's *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, another revolutionary novel written in the sentimental mode. A strong feminist and Jacobin, Hays was a close associate of both Wollstonecraft and William Godwin; she even introduced the two revolutionaries in 1796 (Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution* 302). Reading Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* soon after its publication, Hays found the argument "personally revolutionary" (Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution* 80). She soon published her own analysis of women's inferior

education and culturally imposed subjugation in her 1793 *Letters and Essays, moral and miscellaneous*, a text which established her as a political subversive (Luria, Introduction and a Note 8). In 1798 she published anonymously her *Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women*, a text which, because she had written most of it years earlier, offers little in the way of original argument but which functions, nonetheless, as a “companion piece” to the *Vindication* (Luria, Introduction and a Note 24), Hays’s practical focus and concrete examples adding strength and specificity to Wollstonecraft’s abstract, theoretical arguments (Rogers 139). Hays chose to print her book-length *Appeal* at the end of the century despite its lack of innovation because the *Vindication* had failed to overcome social prejudices against women (Kelly, *Women, Writing, and Revolution* 113). Between these two polemical texts the revolutionary writer published her first novel, *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*. Strongly autobiographical in content, the novel represents a “thinly disguised account” of Hays’s well-known unrequited love for William Frend (Todd, *Sign of Angellica* 241), a Cambridge mathematician and advocate of Godwinian beliefs (Ty 55). Having served as Hays’s tutor and friend since 1794, Godwin, according to Gina Luria, “suggested that Hays set down her ideas about woman’s plight, marriage, and a variety of other concerns, in fictional form,” agreeing to read the manuscript “in progress” (Introduction and a Note 9). The result was *Emma Courtney*, a novel which makes use of Hays’s and Godwin’s correspondence (Spender, *Mothers* 263).

This connection to both Wollstonecraft and Godwin proves highly significant because it is Hays’s use and, more importantly, her resistance to the revolutionary ideas in the *Vindication* and especially *Political Justice* that defines the innovation and disturbance in her particular form of revolutionary feminism. In its day *Emma Courtney* was indeed shocking, largely because of its frank assertion and validation of female desire; the eponymous heroine proclaims her passionate love for a man who has not declared himself to her, and in order to overcome his hesitation, she proposes a sexual relationship outside of marriage. As Dale Spender explains, “Such an explicit statement of

women's sexual need had not been given such unapologetic prominence in fiction before" (*Mothers* 267). As a result, this seeming embrace of sexual license "attracted more remonstrance than any other individual revolutionary novel" (M. Butler 116). Hays's defence of female sexuality strongly confirms the radical tenor of this sentimental, philosophical novel.

However, this work of fiction is much more than a diatribe in favor of sexual freedom. Like *Secresy*, *Emma Courtney* details a feminist argument that is based in a critique of women's conventionally feminine education. As a young girl of the middling ranks, Emma is schooled in one direction, toward romance, and, as a result, she develops an excessive sentimentality that leads her to dedicate her life to the wrong man, so that her tale becomes a compilation of the dire consequences of her ill education and poor judgement. Through Emma's negative example Hays clearly supports the Wollstonecraftian plea for women's rational instruction, for educational reforms which would guide women toward gender parity rather than excess. However, like Fenwick, Hays moves beyond her mentor's feminist and pedagogical arguments in specific and significant ways. Most intriguingly, Hays's feminist innovation develops largely through her manipulation of Godwinian principles and beliefs. In responding to Godwin's theory of human perfectibility and his understanding of the relation between virtue and happiness, Hays uses Emma's voice to offer a more comprehensive reconstruction of sensibility, here in its specific relation to passion and female sexuality, than anything offered in the *Vindication*. At the same time, Hays's assessment of gender constructions as formed by educational practices includes a critical analysis of rationality, rather than a glorification in the mode of Godwin or Wollstonecraft, a critique which includes men's gendered relation to reason as well as passion. Through this discerning exploration of rationality and sensibility, Hays rewrites the notion of balance for women as well as men, thereby expanding late eighteenth-century conceptions of educational reform and refining feminist challenges to dominant gender ideology.

From the initial moments of *Emma Courtney*'s Preface, Hays clearly reveals her central

concern in the novel to be the relation of feeling and thinking. She begins her strategic preface by suggesting, "The most interesting, and the most useful, fictions, are, perhaps, such, as delineating the progress, and tracing the consequences, of one strong, indulged, passion, or prejudice, afford materials, by which the philosopher may calculate the powers of the human mind, and learn the springs which set it in motion" (3). This contention, that the understanding may be improved by studying the passions, recalls Wollstonecraft's assertion: "For what purpose were the passions implanted? That man by struggling with them might attain a degree of knowledge denied to the brutes, whispers Experience" (VRW 91). Wollstonecraft's notion of balance demands that the mind control the emotions, that "the exercise of the understanding, as life advances, is the only method pointed out by nature to calm the passions" (VRW 154). In her prefatory remarks Hays appears to echo these Wollstonecraftian sentiments, proposing to study the effect of imbalance upon the female character, the consequences of a passion that is "strong" and "indulged." Indeed, Emma is a woman of extremes, "a human being, loving virtue while enslaved by passion," her errors "the offspring of sensibility" (4); she is a Sibella figure, indulging her emotions without the tempering influence of a rational Caroline. Hays goes on to suggest that she offers Emma's experience as "a *warning*, rather than as an example" (4) to "the feeling and the thinking few" (5) who will read her story. Within the narrative frame of the memoirs Emma offers her tale of excessive passion to her adopted son, the second Augustus Harley, in order "To shorten and meliorate [his] way" (9) since he, as Emma before him, loves someone who is married to another (7). To Emma's as well as Hays's intended readership, therefore, the novel claims to be a caution against excessive passion, a tale in favor of self-control which demonstrates, according to Marilyn Butler, "that women will never be free unless they learn to submit their passions to the control of reason" (44). Emma has no such control, and the cause of her gross imbalance is her inadequate education.

In her retrospective narrative Emma reveals her belief in environmental psychology,



suggesting that “We are all the creatures of education” mediated by “chance, or accident” (8). In her early years Emma receives instruction largely at the hands of her “excellent” aunt (10), Mrs Melmoth. After the death of Emma’s mother, the heroine’s dissipated and reticent father sends Emma to live with the Melmoths where she experiences life among the mercantile classes. Emma recalls these years in her uncle’s household as a time of “joy and innocence” (15), running and playing with her cousins, wrapped in the love of this bourgeois family. In the Melmoth home Emma is drawn to her benevolent aunt, a woman of “great sensibility, quickness of perception, some anxiety of temper, and a refined and romantic manner of thinking” (11). The aunt indulges and entertains Emma and her cousins with “stories from the Arabian Nights, Turkish Tales, and other works of like marvellous import” (14). These romantic stories arouse Emma’s desire to learn to read, a skill which her uncle helps her develop, but they also excite her emotions (14-15). Emma quickly grows “attached” to her books, stories becoming her “passion” as she “sighed for a romance that would never end” (15). Left to “wander unrestrained in fiction” (Richardson 105), Emma develops a feminine sensibility which is, according to Janet Todd, solipsistic rather than benevolent (*Sign of Angellica* 243); Emma’s reading renders her “vain and self-willed” (14). For the first twelve years of her life, Emma’s earliest educational experiences may make for a happy childhood, but they also nurture an excessive sensibility and a romantic passion.

At her father’s command Emma is then sent to boarding school for three years where her sentimental excess is met with feminine accomplishments and trivialities. Wholly unlike Emma’s familial environment where amusements take precedence over the “hated” needle (15), boarding school is all constraint, but constraint to no rational purpose. Emma explains, “I was obliged to sit poring over needle-work, and forbidden to prate;—my body was tortured into forms, my mind coerced, and talks imposed upon me, grammar and French, mere words, that conveyed to me no ideas” (15). The “ignorant, splenetic” teachers instruct the young Emma in the usual female

accomplishments (16), and, like any fashionable boarding school, the curriculum offers no depth, no intellectual rigor. Instruction connotes rules and rote learning, memorization and superficial investigation rather than rational understanding (15-16). Certainly, the school does not cater to Emma's emotional excess, the teachers and other students ridiculing rather than indulging Emma's sensibility, sporting, as Emma says, "with the acuteness of my sensations" (16), but because the boarding school education offers nothing substantial as an alternative intellectual interest beyond trivial feminine accomplishments, Emma's hungry mind remains drawn to romantic fantasies. Indeed, the young Emma manages to support her romantic interests even in this repressive environment by "procur[ing]" books (16), and when she manages to escape her "prison" (17) as she terms her boarding school (although she admits she becomes better reconciled to the school after her first year there), she returns to the Melmoth home, now saddened by the death of Emma's uncle, only to subscribe to a circulating library from which she "read, or rather devoured—little careful in the selection—from ten to fourteen novels in a week" (18). Without proper supervision or rational schooling, Emma reads her way to romantic excess.

Between her aunt and the teachers at the boarding school, then, Emma gets a faulty education, one that arouses and nurtures her excessive sensibility and sentimental romanticism, providing her with no sense of judgement or reason. Ironically, it is Emma's degenerate father who finally initiates her rational development.

Recognizing that Emma has been "weakened and spoiled" by the Melmoth's indulgence, that her sensibility "was but too acute" (19), Mr Courtney arranges for Emma to spend one day a week at his house in town where she can have access to his library, where she can listen to his debates with his friends. Raised more or less in isolation, "conversing only with books" (46), Emma now gains the opportunity to mix in society, to gain worldly knowledge and read scholarly materials. Indeed, rather than the "fairy fields of fiction" upon which Emma was weaned (21), Mr Courtney

gives Emma books of historical facts and “the science of the world” (21). Presented with the lives of Plutarch, Mr Courtney’s young charge reads reluctantly at first only to have her “enthusiasm awakened” to republicanism and political philosophy (22). In fact, Emma exhibits a clear ability for rational discourse and intellectual investigation, as she explains:

My early associations rendered theology an interesting subject to me; I read ecclesiastical history, a detail of errors and crimes, and entered deeply into polemic divinity: my mind began to be emancipated, doubts had been suggested to it, I reasoned freely, endeavored to arrange and methodize my opinions, and to trace them fearlessly through all their consequences: while from exercising my thoughts with freedom, I seemed to acquire new strength and dignity of character. (25)

In her father’s house Emma is introduced to masculine subjects such as controversial theology and metaphysics, and through sustained inquiry into these intellectual matters Emma activates her innate rational capacity. Through intense exploration of serious discourses Emma’s mind is “emancipated;” she is able to systematize her thoughts, to challenge her logic, to exercise her reason. Although Emma still has a taste for poetry and fiction (25), her Wollstonecraftian initiation into a rational, masculine education in both content and methodology provides her with the “strength and dignity of character” necessary to reason toward virtue.

Of course, Mr Courtney does not actually participate to any significant degree in Emma’s rational schooling. Far from serving as Emma’s guide and tutor, the older gentleman, “in the intervals of his various occupations and amusements,” would simply “assist” his daughter “with occasional remarks and reflections” (20). Emma explains that as a “man of pleasure,” Mr Courtney is a “social” rather than a “rational” man (30). Nevertheless, Emma’s father provides the heroine with the initial access, the earliest means by which to develop her reasoning abilities. Later, both Mr Francis and Augustus continue Emma’s schooling in rational discourses, Mr Francis serving as her wise counsellor and Augustus recommending polemical books and helping her to form “a just judgment of the principles they contain” as she continues her “pursuit of knowledge and truth” (97). In this intellectual quest Emma continually proves herself a worthy scholar; although Emma’s

passion for Augustus becomes obsessive and extreme, a good portion of the novel consists of her reasoned pleas and logical arguments to Augustus asking him to respond to her emotions (e.g. 97-98, 102, 120-25). Emma's sensibility may be excessive, but she has a strong mind and intellectual prowess.

In terms of class, then, these early educational influences, Emma's aunt and father, constitute an ironic class reversal which voices a critique of court values clinging to bourgeois culture. Emma's descriptions of the joy and affection she experiences in the "Eden" (17) of the Melmoth household in contrast to the cold environment of her father's abode suggests a clear privileging of the emerging bourgeois class and its values. In fact, Emma's time with the Melmoths is presented as something of a bourgeois idyll. Mr and Mrs Melmoth are self-made people of the mercantile middle classes, earning enough money by trade to retire to the country. As in *Secresy*, the issue of the source of the benevolent characters' trade wealth produces some ambiguity in the novel. The Melmoths earn their wealth through the West Indian shipping trade (11), a business which invokes concerns of colonialism and slavery. Unlike Fenwick, Hays does speak to the issue directly, if only briefly and if only as it impinges on some minor characters. When Emma as an adult becomes reacquainted with her cousin, the Melmoth's son who made his fortune in Jamaica, Augustus articulates a defence of "freedom and humanity" and a condemnation of the slave trade, a speech which thoroughly impresses Emma (111-12). Yet Hays does not comment upon the older Melmoth's fortune, displacing her criticism onto the next generation, characters who do not feature prominently in Emma's life.<sup>7</sup> Instead, Emma idealizes her loving aunt and uncle, explaining that "They possessed little property; but the one was enterprising and industrious, the other careful and æconomical; and both, with hearts glowing with affection for each other" (11). In Mr and Mrs Melmoth, Hays presents the modern kind of companionate marriage rather than a traditionally mercenary union, an affectionate relationship which translates to the couple's children and the little Emma.

In contrast, Emma's parents are a useless combination of rank and wealth. Emma's father "was a man of some talents, and of a superior rank in life, but dissipated, extravagant, and profligate," who courted Emma's mother for her inheritance; the heroine's mother was an heiress of trade wealth attracted to Mr Courtney's fashionable manners (10). Yet Emma's dissipated father is the one who gives Emma the rational education she so needs, while her middle-class aunt encourages her destructive and excessive sentimentality. Of course, Mr Courtney's motives are far from selfless; he seeks to prepare Emma for the world with a serious education because his luxurious and profligate lifestyle, which he refuses to sacrifice, has caused him to squander her inheritance (28). More significant is Mrs Melmoth. This "excellent" (10) woman's endorsement of the kind of exaggerated sensibility that dominated aristocratic values earlier in the eighteenth century and, more importantly, the ill effects this extreme emotionalism proves to have for Emma's life expose the destructiveness inherent in the persistence of court values in bourgeois culture. Emma's pedagogical experiences thus serve Hays's Jacobinism.

More significantly, Emma's early tutelage and upbringing support a harsh critique of women's conventional, feminine education. Certainly, Emma receives, as a result of her father's influence, rational instruction, but hers is a case of too little, too late. On her deathbed Mrs Melmoth may seek to undo the damage she has done Emma by counselling moderation against excessive sensibility, but the old romantic's words are at once ironic and futile. Mrs Melmoth advises Emma, "Endeavour to contract your wants, and aspire only to a rational independence; by exercising your faculties, still the importunate suggestions of your sensibility . . . I tremble even for the excess of those virtues which I have laboured to cultivate in your lively and docile mind" (27). But Emma is already the product of her sentimental upbringing, her feminine education. Like Fenwick's Sibella, Emma may have an innate rational capacity, and Emma even has the opportunity to exercise that ability to a degree that Sibella does not, but Emma is drastically unbalanced; her adolescent

intellectual development cannot contain her excessive sensibility so that, like Sibella, Emma errs. Transported to the Morton home where Emma finds neither stimulation nor familial warmth, the unconventional heroine dedicates herself to the wrong man, Augustus Harley; like Fenwick's Arthur Murden, the romantic Emma falls in love with an ideal. Her one friend, Mrs Harley, shows Emma a portrait of the older woman's son, Augustus, describing the young man to Emma on numerous occasions, and, as a result, the sentimental heroine falls in love with Augustus's image well before meeting the man (54). When Augustus appears as the handsome stranger who rescues Emma and her would-be suitor, Montague, from their carriage accident, Emma's passion holds full sway (63). Her singular love may, as Eleanor Ty suggests, support "the Godwinian and Jacobin emphasis on individual merit rather than on birth, fortune, and heredity" (50) since Augustus has neither rank nor wealth, but her passion also leads Emma to place her romantic principles over social convention (70), a defiant move which, as Sibella also discovers, courts disaster.

Emma's inadequate education and consequent ill judgement thus provide Hays with the opportunity to voice many feminist arguments reminiscent of her *Letters* and her *Appeal*, and especially of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*. Emma's childhood experiences not only leave her vulnerable to her excessive sensibility, but they also render her unable to support herself economically. Emma complains,

Why was I not educated for commerce, for a profession, for labour? Why have I been rendered feeble and delicate by bodily constraint, and fastidious by artificial refinement? Why are we bound, by the habits of society, as with an adamant chain? Why do we suffer ourselves to be confined within a magic circle, without daring, by a magnanimous effort, to dissolve the barbarous spell? (32)

As a single woman without fortune, Emma is incapable of existing independently because her feminine education traps her within the "magic circle" of femininity, or the woman's proper sphere. Like Wollstonecraft, Hays continually argues for women's access to the professions as a means of independence and usefulness (e.g. 85-86, 117-18, 162-63). Indeed, Emma clearly desires not only

economic independence, but also socially significant activity since she abhors “a life of indolence and vacuity” (75). But educated toward no profession, granted no useful channel toward which she might direct her energies, Emma’s attention becomes focussed on the only socially acceptable object of a woman’s interest, a man. Confined to this “state of PERPETUAL BABYISM” (*Appeal* 97), Emma declares, “Why call woman, miserable, oppressed, and impotent, woman—*crushed, and then insulted*—why call her to *independence*—which not nature, but the barbarous and accursed laws of society, have denied her? *This is mockery!*” (143). Women are the products of their environment, and without a serious education they remain, as Emma does, dependent, frustrated, and useless, mere slaves to their sensibilities.

What follows from Emma’s passionate desire is a wholly unconventional romance plot in which Hays reverses the sex roles of the two would-be lovers in order to further her critique of patriarchal culture. Far from the passive, silent heroine of sentimental fiction who must wait for the man to speak his desire, Emma is the pursuer in this romance plot. In overt defiance of eighteenth-century courtship conventions and notions of propriety and virtue, Emma wonders, “why should I hesitate to inform him of my affection” (79), deciding, in an overt appropriation of the “masculine right to selection” (Ty 56), to inform Augustus of her feelings (79-80). Detailing the evils attendant upon constructing chastity as a sexual virtue (144), Emma openly asserts her sexual desire while Augustus, the object of her passionate chase, falls mute. Augustus becomes the mysterious ideal, the dissimulating coquette who hides his feelings and manipulates his suitor. Through the absurdity of the ensuing situation and the suffering that follows, this ironic reversal forcefully exposes the destructiveness of the sexual double standard of eighteenth-century courtship rituals. When one lover can speak and the other cannot, when one equivocates while the other declares truthfully, mature connection cannot result, irrespective of which sex assumes dominance.

This concern with truthful declaration speaks directly to the novel’s apparent moral.

Although Emma expressly states both at the beginning and end of the novel that she tells her tale as a warning against excessive passion, the body of the text qualifies her assertion. When Emma declares her love for Augustus, she is fully aware of his financial situation, that without a fortune of his own Augustus is dependent upon an inheritance from a misanthropic uncle who bequeathed Augustus an annual sum on the condition that he not marry (52). When Augustus refuses to respond to her declaration, Emma simply wants to know if his heart is free or if he loves another. But Augustus equivocates. He hints that there is some obstacle preventing him from loving her (96), but despite Emma's persistent entreaties that he tell her the whole truth however painful, Augustus refuses to confirm or deny the existence of an attachment. He remains "a perfect enigma" (101), his silence allowing Emma to court adultery since his "*obligations*" turn out to be his marriage to a foreign woman (135). His ambiguity thus infects Emma with "the deceitful poison of hope" (75).<sup>8</sup> She explains that she could yield to "reason" if she knew for a certainty that he was beyond her (95), but he will not grant her such peace. Instead, his dissimulation turns her love into obsession. She explains, "Mine were not common feelings—It is *obscurity* and *mystery* which has wrought them up to frenzy—*truth* and *certainty* would, long ere this, have caused them temperately to subside into their accustomed channels" (119). Emma acknowledges her passionate nature but identifies Augustus's "obscurity" as responsible for turning those feelings into obsession. Disingenuousness is the cause of her passionate excess.

Like Fenwick, then, Hays strikes out at secrecy as a serious threat to the emancipatory power of Enlightenment. Emma ostensibly constructs her tale as an argument by example against excessive sensibility, but her moral seems to be as much about ingenuousness. Indeed, on the first page of her address to young Augustus she speaks about "the value and importance of unequivocal sincerity" (7) even as she cautions against passion. Emma's problems stem not so much from her romantic nature as from the lack of disclosure; reason could overcome her propensity to excess if she but knew the



truth. Hays's attitude to passion and sensibility thus prove to be more complicated than her prefatory remarks would suggest.

In fact, while Emma's prefatory and concluding remarks depict sensibility as dangerous in its excess, the body of her memoirs articulates a prolonged defence of passion. As argued previously, in her *Vindication* Wollstonecraft reconstructs rather than rejects sensibility, distinguishing between, as Barker-Benfield suggests, feelings tempered by reason and excessive emotionalism (*Culture of Sensibility* 281). But Wollstonecraft's reconstructive efforts, couched in her overall attempt to promote reason, are increasingly compromised by her obvious discomfort with the sexual implications of sensibility; she recommends, for example, that marriages be based solely on friendship rather than romantic love because passionless marriages persevere while passionate attachments fade with time (*VRW* 113-15). Such extreme assertions at times create confusion and disrupt the logic of her feminist reconstructions. Hays, on the other hand, offers a much more thorough and consistent response to sensibility, especially as it turns to sexual passion. In one of her reasoned pleas to Augustus to acknowledge her desire, Emma says,

I recollect you once told me "It was our duty to make our reason conquer the sensibility of our heart." Yet, why? Is, then, apathy the perfection of our nature—and is not that nature refined and harmonized by the gentle and social affections? The Being who gave to the mind its reason, gave also to the heart its sensibility.

I make no apologies for, because I feel no consciousness of, weakness. (82)

Without disclaiming the necessary presence of reason, Emma declares sensibility, which in this context implies passion, a divinely-inspired, integral part of human nature requiring no "apologies." She grants passion divine status alongside rationality and proclaims that she is "not ashamed of being a human being" (98); she sees no weakness in embracing her natural, passionate desires.

Emma's argument in this context cannot be reduced to the irrational ravings of an obsessive woman trying desperately to justify her unconventional desires; on the contrary, Emma offers a reasoned defence of passion based, ironically enough, on Godwinian logic. Godwin, the philosopher

of absolute reason, clearly enjoys a strong presence in the novel. Hays frequently quotes his *Political Justice* (as well as Wollstonecraft's *Vindication*), and Mr Francis, the quintessential man of reason, makes use of Godwin's actual letters to Hays in his fictional correspondence to Emma (Todd, *Sign of Angellica* 246). Mr Francis counsels Emma against her extravagant passion by referring to the Godwinian philosophy of human perfectibility, by asserting that "the increase of knowledge must necessarily prepare the way for the increase for virtue and happiness" (48). He claims that reason will prevail as the basis of social progress, that rational knowledge will eventually change the minds of men and consequently their social systems, so that the individual's duty is "to expand the mind" rather than the passions in order to exert a rational influence over others in one's circle (49-51). Emma accepts Mr Francis's counsel and speaks her own understanding of Godwinian philosophy, concentrating on the role Godwin ascribes to happiness in this construct of social progress. She says,

Individual happiness constitutes the general good:—*happiness* is the only true *end* of existence;—all notions of morals, founded on any other principle, involve in themselves a contradiction, and must be erroneous. Man does right, when pursuing interest and pleasure—it argues no depravity—this is the fable of superstition: he ought only to be careful, that, in seeking his own good, he does not render it incompatible with the good of others—that he does not consider himself as standing alone in the universe. (116)

To Emma as to Godwin, what is moral is what produces happiness without hurting others.

However, whereas Godwin relies on pure reason as the grounding source of this virtuous happiness, Emma allows room for passion. In his detailed analysis of Hays, Gary Kelly explores the woman writer's intellectual relation to Godwin, suggesting that Hays "resisted [Godwin's] condemnation of the domestic affections as an irrational prejudice . . . she argues that the passions, rather than being an obstacle to happiness, are the source of desire for the good" (*Women, Writing, and Revolution* 91). In fact, as early as the second page of her memoirs Emma asserts, "Sensation generates interest, interest passion, passion forces attention, attention supplies the powers, and affords the means of attaining its end" (8). Emma identifies sensation as the initiating force in the

individual's quest for knowledge ("interest"), a pursuit which seeks its end in virtue and happiness. She constructs passion as power, or more specifically, as an "invigorating, power" (134) that functions as "the generative principle of [her] reason" (142). Emma may suggest, therefore, that one should "be not the slave of [one's] passions," but she also demands that the individual should "neither dream of eradicating them" (8). Social progress, human virtue, and general happiness may require that reason govern the passions and guard against uncontrollable excess, but governance does not mean repression or dismissal. Through Emma, Hays reinterprets Godwin to argue that the passions are necessary to animate reason and, as such, cannot be denied or ignored if society and the individual are to progress toward virtue and happiness through individual and collective self-education.

Emma proves Hays's revised notion of the relation of passion and reason in the fictional character's unsuccessful marriage to Montague. When Emma finally discovers the truth from Mrs Harley, that Augustus is a married man as well as a father (135), Emma's reason gradually regains control of her emotions. Moving to London after the death of Mrs Harley, Emma loses her small income in the collapse of the banking-house in which she has invested her money (165-66), and in a decidedly practical move she finally acquiesces to Montague's marriage proposal (168). While for Montague this union may derive from great desire, for Emma the marriage is Wollstonecraftian in its absence of passion and its rational basis in friendship and recompensatory motherhood (181). She explains, "I felt for my husband a rational esteem, and a grateful affection;—but those romantic, high-wrought, frenzied, emotions, that had rent my heart during its first attachment—that enthusiasm, that fanaticism, to which opposition had given force, the bare recollection of which still shook my soul with anguish, no longer existed" (169). Freed of her "frenzied" emotions, her "fanaticism" for Augustus, the latter term invoking a sense of madness and possession or a pseudo-religious "enthusiasm" at once excessive and mistaken, Emma is now able to exercise her rational capacity

in order to become useful to society. “Ever thirsting after knowledge” (168), Emma studies the medical sciences in order to be “serviceable to [her] friend,” her doctor husband (169). Although her passion erupts once more when Augustus appears at her home injured from a riding accident, Emma’s reason recalls her to her “duty” and she is able to provide for him as a doctor in his dying hours (173). Soon thereafter, when Montague’s mistress informs Emma that Montague murdered his bastard child by a hapless servant girl, Rachel, again Emma is able “to stifle [her] emotions in the active duties of humanity” (188), administering to Rachel in her time of need. Steeling herself against her excessive sensibility, the married Emma becomes active and useful, socially responsible and rational, an apt example of Wollstonecraft’s civic mother and a clear participant in Godwin’s model of social perfectibility.

The problem is that Emma still is not happy. When desperately pursuing Augustus to no avail, the frustrated Emma determines “to live, not for future enjoyment—that is now, for ever, past—*but for future usefulness*” (129); Emma’s excessive passion fails to provide her with any joy. However, so does her rational marriage to Montague. The portrait Hays paints of Emma’s wedded life is pale, lifeless, and unappealing in comparison with the heroine’s earlier experience of unrequited and forbidden love. Certainly, Emma the wife becomes actively useful to society through exercising her reasoning powers, but something is missing and its absence precludes a full expression of happiness; that element is passion. Early in her memoirs the sensitive Emma asks, “Why is intellect and virtue so far from conferring happiness?” (87). The answer, as demonstrated through Emma’s experience, is that happiness requires a certain amount of sensibility as well as rationality. Because Godwin identifies happiness as the measure of social good and active virtue, the lack of joy in Emma’s rational, dutiful, socially responsible marriage suggests that Godwin needs to add passion to his social dialectic. Hays thus reacts against Godwin’s notion of human perfectibility in order to rework late eighteenth-century understandings of the relation between reason and passion.

As a result, Emma's warning to young Augustus at the close of her memoirs concerning the dangers of excessive passion is overdetermined and ironic. She writes, "let me behold my Augustus, escaped from the tyranny of the passions, restored to reason, to the vigor of his mind, to self-controul, to the dignity of active, intrepid, virtue!" (196). However, she also states, "The social affections were necessary to my existence, but they have been only inlets to sorrow—*yet, still, I bind them to my heart!*" (195). Emma acknowledges that her sensibility has not led to her happiness, but her passions were excessive or out of balance and they were denied social expression; hence, they were incapable of bringing her enjoyment in her specific environment. Moreover, Emma still sees enough value in those feelings not to deny them even as she purports to counsel young Augustus otherwise. Eleanor Ty, therefore, seems entirely correct in her assertion that Emma's "half-hearted repentance and her romantic narrative do not actually condemn pure passion as much as the conventions of society which do not tolerate its expression" (58). In the middle of her memoirs Emma utters the novel's central question: "Is it virtue, then, to combat, or to yield to, my passions?" (118). The final answer proves to be neither as clear-cut nor as one-sided as the narrative frame and rhetorical investment would seem to suggest. Hays persuasively rethinks the function of passion in the growth toward happiness and virtue for the individual as well as society.

At the same time, she also reconsiders the role of reason. Because Hays's notion of gender balance requires that reason must govern the passions without negating them, it follows that reason must be held in check as well as sensibility, that one's rationality must not become too exaggerated lest it fully repress the passions. Therefore, Hays offers in *Emma Courtney* what neither Wollstonecraft nor Fenwick (nor Godwin for that matter) proposes, a critique of reason. This analysis is presented largely through the male characters in the novel who function as the primary representatives of rationality.

If Emma is a woman of excessive emotion in a text that advocates moderation, the men in

her memoirs are as extreme in their own ways. Once again, as in *The Wrongs of Woman* and *Secresy*, the negatively feminized male makes a destructive appearance. The silly “coxcomb” (22) whom the young Emma hears at her father’s house railing against “masculine” women of “knowledge and learning” (23) reappears in her memoirs as the soldier Pemberton, “the man of fashion and gallantry” whose feminine affectation and superficiality render him insipid and ridiculous (109). More significant is Montague. Like his future wife, this man of fashion is given to extreme emotion. “Bold, ardent, romantic,” Montague is “blown about by every gust of passion,” wholly lacking reason and principle (37), liable to “burst into tears” (57) whenever his sensibility is strained, finally killing himself when his passionate nature can be contained no longer (189-90). Hays clearly demonstrates that emotional excess proves injurious to either sex as Montague is finally destroyed by his immoderate feminine sensibility.

At the other extreme are the more significant male figures in the novel who come under scrutiny for, to use Claudia Johnson’s term, their “hypermascularity” (*Equivocal Beings* 45). As the indecisive, silent, mysterious object of another’s desire, Augustus Harley seems another feminized male, rendered less than manly by his complicated inheritance and his obvious respect for property; in fact, his name refers to Mackenzie’s *Man of Feeling* (Barker-Benfield, *Culture of Sensibility* 365). However, if the sex roles in the romance plot are reversed, the gender roles are not; Augustus may seem a feminized male, but he is really overly masculine because he is entirely devoid of sensibility and passion. Augustus may claim to make “the human heart his study” (87), yet he does not seem to feel. As Augustus perpetually fails to respond to either Emma’s effusions or her reasoned arguments, the frustrated heroine accuses him again and again of being cold and unfeeling (e.g. 103, 122, 126, 134, 155, 158-59). After such reticence and indifference, his deathbed declaration of love seems superficial and hollow (178). If Augustus does indeed love Emma, he clearly uses his reason not to govern his passions, but utterly to repress them, and with shocking success. Because this

repression turns out to be the cause of such misery, Hays clearly uses Augustus to criticize men without sensibility.

More significantly, if more subtly, Hays extends this criticism to the most rational character in the novel, Mr Francis. As a Godwinian figure Mr Francis is “the voice of reason and control” (Todd, *Sign of Angellica* 251) who “wages an all-out war against sensibility” (Todd, *Sign of Angellica* 246). He is prefigured in the novel by Emma’s rationalist father whom even the young Emma recognizes as having little if any affection (25). After Mr Courtney’s death Mr Francis becomes Emma’s advisor, and although he may be invited by the heroine to function as her “conscience” (36), he also becomes the target of Hays’s criticism. If Emma is a woman of excessive sensibility and passion, Mr Francis is a man of hyperrationality; he is all reason, no feeling. In firm Godwinian fashion Mr Francis offers knowledge as the only path to amelioration (50-51), claiming that “There is no topic, in fact, that may not be subjected to the laws of investigation and reasoning” (138). But in placing independent rationality above all else (140), Mr Francis disables emotion, a consequence Emma recognizes immediately. Early in their acquaintance she says, “I respected his reason, but I doubted whether I could inspire him with sympathy, or make him fully comprehend my feelings” (39). Although Mr Francis shortly “appeared moved” by Emma’s tears (40), any fellow feeling is short-lived and shallow; in the moment of Emma’s greatest personal pain over Augustus, Mr Francis reduces her feelings to “moon-struck madness” (139), callously referring to her unrequited love as a “non-entity” (140). Mr Francis speaks as “the voice of abstract rationalism” (Ty 58) to a woman who loves individually (145), and Emma rebukes him for his inability to recognize the power of passion (147). Despite Mr Francis’s logical arguments, Emma’s defence of passion suggests that reason is neither a social nor a personal panacea. Through Emma’s reactions to this Godwinian figure, therefore, Hays criticizes men without feeling even as she reproaches women with too much. Emma’s conversations with Mr Francis suggest that his belief in the power of reason must

take into account personal feelings because exaggerated rationality, like extreme and unchecked passion, can prove deleterious.

Hays thus asserts the need for a gender reconstruction for the late eighteenth-century male, and the close of her novel implies, if it does not realize, an attempt to effect this transformation through education. Emma writes her memoirs with an educative purpose; she wishes to help her adopted son avoid repeating her mistakes. Like Wollstonecraft's Maria, Emma tells her tale as a means of teaching the next generation, but Hays challenges the literary convention by having Emma educate a young man rather than a daughter.<sup>9</sup> The sex of Emma's young pupil suggests that men as well as women need reconstruction, that men need a positive femininity in order to avoid being simply cold rationalists like the older Augustus or Mr Francis. However, like Fenwick, Hays can only project and posit this transformation; she does not realize it in the novel. She can offer no representation of a positively feminized male, only the possibility of such reform in the next generation. Nevertheless, Hays goes beyond Wollstonecraft and Fenwick in clearly and firmly asserting the necessity of male gender reconstruction at the turn of the century, detailing in persuasive illustration the imperative of such transformation for the individual and society.

In *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, then, Hays articulates a more sophisticated notion of balance than either Wollstonecraft or Fenwick, and Hays extends that argument to include both sexes. Suggesting that Hays uses her heroine to "illustrate Wollstonecraft's general diagnosis of the causes of excessive sensibility in women," G.J. Barker-Benfield claims that "instead of grasping the balanced solution Wollstonecraft offered, Hays slides into the aggrandizement of extreme, feminine sensibility which seems genuine, not merely symptomatic" (*Culture of Sensibility* 366). However, I suggest that Hays, far from falling prey to the conventional demands of sensibility, rewrites the revolutionary notion of gender balance from a more mature, comprehensive perspective. Wollstonecraft may forcefully expose the ill effects of sensibility without rationality, but she does



not explore the implications of an inverse imbalance, of a life of reason devoid of passion, at least in her *Vindication*.<sup>10</sup> Wollstonecraft's endorsement of pure rationality, of "hypermasculinity" (Johnson, *Equivocal Beings* 45), suggests that both sexes need to become more masculinized. Hays, on the other hand, explores the damaging effects of imbalance in both directions. She offers a clearer and stronger revaluation of sensibility in its relation to passion than any argument in either Wollstonecraft or Fenwick while simultaneously reacting against excessive rationality. Hays endorses neither exaggerated femininity nor, significantly, extreme masculinity because either excess destabilizes the proper relation of reason and passion. According to *Emma Courtney*, men need to embrace a feminine sensibility as women need masculine rationality, and this construction of balance defines the discerning, disruptive depth of Hays's revolutionary feminism.

Friends of each other and of Mary Wollstonecraft, Eliza Fenwick and Mary Hays take up the revolutionary ideology of their Jacobin friends and their feminist mentor and create their own responses to the political radicalism and revolutionary feminism at the end of the eighteenth century. Both writers explore the relation of gender and pedagogy, embracing Wollstonecraft's reformist claims and challenging the class and gender limitations of their mentor's arguments in order to increase the revolutionary feminist potential of late eighteenth-century proposals for gender and educational reform. As the counter-revolution gains strength toward the end of the century and the political atmosphere in Britain grows increasingly repressive, Hays and Fenwick leave their feminist legacy to more overtly conservative early nineteenth-century women writers like Amelia Opie and Hannah More. Although More and Opie seem to support dominant notions of women's submission and female subordination, these seemingly traditional female novelists, like their radical predecessors, seek gender reconstruction through educational reform, and the disruptive undercurrents of their apparently orthodox novels warrant critical attention.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In my examination of Fenwick's and Hays's novels, I will consider the implications of Wollstonecraft's *Vindication* but not *The Wrongs of Woman* because Wollstonecraft's novel was first printed in 1797, after the publication of both *Secresy* and *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*.

<sup>2</sup> Grundy correctly notes that Kelly mentions *Secresy* on page 29 of his *English Fiction of the Romantic Period 1789-1830* (he also mentions the novel in passing in his essay, "Women Novelists and the French Revolution Debate: Novelizing the Revolution/Revolutionizing the Novel" [379]), and Turner does the same on pages 170 and 222 of *Living by the Pen*. Spender catalogues the book on page 124 of her *Mothers of the Novel*.

<sup>3</sup> In *The Wrongs of Woman*, as well, the eponymous heroine resides at the upper end of these professional bourgeois classes.

<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Fenwick's letters suggest that her personal discomfort concerning her own participation in the Barbados slavery system remained unresolved (Wedd 168-69).

<sup>5</sup> Grundy correctly points out in a footnote to Sibella's discussion of her tutor that "Bonnevillle teaches Sibella the revolutionary ideal of fraternity" as well as developing her reasoning powers (Introduction 74). Indeed, the French Revolution enters the novel in several places, the most pronounced instance concerning Clement's Parisian lover, Janetta Laundry, who moves to London after her aristocratic family is "stripped of their honours and possessions" by the French Revolutionary government (196).

<sup>6</sup> Of course, Caroline has a vested interest in preventing her mother's marriage to Davenport; should this couple have any male children, Caroline would be disinherited. However, Fenwick never alludes to a mercenary motive on Caroline's part. On the contrary, Caroline, whose sincerity is doubted nowhere in the text, claims, "Not but I should rejoice to see my mother yield herself to the guardianship of some good man, who had sense enough to advise, and resolution to restrain her lavish follies. Of such an union I have not any hope" (142). It would seem that Caroline recoils only at a bad marriage for her mother, not marriage in general. Certainly, Sibella, not money, is Caroline's concern when near the end of the novel Miss Ashburn learns of her mother's ill-conceived marriage to Clement.

<sup>7</sup> Further, Mrs Denbeigh, the Melmoth's daughter who proves to be a useful and generous friend to Emma, also owes her fortune to her husband's trade, this time in India; again, Hays makes no comment upon the colonialism when it informs significant, benevolent characters. As for Emma, she does not seem to benefit from the spoils of colonial exploitation; she is not, after all, a Melmoth. Yet her small inheritance comes from her mother's trade wealth, and considering the other sources of trade in the novel, the origin of her paltry income seems open to question. Thus, although Hays makes an attempt to address the issue of slavery, colonialism remains a problematic issue qualifying the progressiveness of this Jacobin novel as it does in *Secresy*.

<sup>8</sup> The hapless and passionate Montague may accuse Emma of having a cold, inflexible heart (58), much as Emma will later say of Augustus, but Emma's treatment of Montague is entirely unlike Augustus's handling of Emma in that Emma is forthright from the beginning with Montague, declaring that she has no interest in him; she never offers him "the deceitful poison of hope" (75).

Montague's romantic illusions are purely the creation of his own excessive sensibility.

<sup>9</sup> Emma does try her hand at educating her daughter as well as her adoptive son, but little Emma dies before the results of the heroine's influence can be fully realized. In an ironic Rousseauvian fashion, Emma educates her daughter and adoptive son for each other, but unlike Rousseau Emma gives each child "the same lessons" until the age of twelve (193). Nevertheless, the fact remains that Emma writes her memoirs specifically for the young Augustus.

<sup>10</sup> As demonstrated in chapter three, Wollstonecraft does briefly explore the implications of a life devoid of sensibility in *The Wrongs of Woman* through the character of Jemima. However, as indicated above, this text was not published until the year after *Emma Courtney*, and, as such, I do not take Wollstonecraft's novel into account in my present analysis.

## Chapter Five: Amelia Opie, Hannah More, and the Art of Indirection

She who is a vain pedant because she has read much, has probably that defect in her mind which would have made her a vain fool if she had read nothing. It is not her having more knowledge but less sense, which makes her insufferable.

Hannah More, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799)

In the early years of the nineteenth century, British women writers found themselves confronted with a much altered political and literary climate. Robespierre's Reign of Terror, the British Treason Trials of 1794, and the persistent threat of Napoleonic invasion rendered radical support of French Revolutionary ideals highly unpopular in Britain, so that a repressive, conservative atmosphere came to dominate the discursive and political terrain during the last years of the eighteenth century. The publication of Godwin's "well-intentioned but ill-timed" *Memoirs of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1798 (Ty 19) helped direct this reactionary fervor against literary women in particular ways. Revelations of Wollstonecraft's infatuations, sexual affairs, and suicide attempts provided conservatives with the ammunition to denounce feminism's detrimental and immoral effects, its association with sexual licentiousness and anti-Englishness (Ty 19), so that by the turn of the century the position of intellectual women had become "untenable" (Eberle 126). Women writers responded to such repressive measures by adjusting their discourse accordingly. Despite the remasculinization of culture and literature in the early 1800s, women

writers, according to Gary Kelly, “found new opportunities for using ‘their’ genre to participate in the ‘matter of the Revolution’” (“Women Novelists” 382). Kelly suggests that because a leading task in the post-Revolutionary culture was to repair what seemed to be a rupture in the cultural and discursive order, and since reparation and healing were typically accepted as woman’s work, “women writers were quick to exploit this opening,” engaging in “novelistic reconstruction of the public sphere” without appearing to challenge the culture’s increasing insistence on female domesticity (“Women Novelists” 382). To resist the masculine appropriation of literature and culture while simultaneously avoiding negative association with Wollstonecraft, women novelists constructed discursive methods and narrative techniques, strategies of indirection and subversion, which allowed them to address highly charged political topics, including women’s education, without censure (Ty 20). As two of the most significant female writers in this new decade, Amelia Opie and Hannah More mask their revisionary agendas with conservative and moralistic rhetoric, thereby gaining cultural applause for their seemingly conventional discourses while helping to bring the 1790s tradition of female insurgence into the nineteenth century.

Literary history’s tendency to paint Opie and More as conservatives derives partially from the writers’ shared concern with religion; More’s Evangelicalism dominates her writing and Opie’s discourse becomes increasingly religious and didactic as her interest in Quakerism develops. Opie, however, serves as a unique transitional figure between 1790s women radicals and apparent nineteenth-century reactionaries like More, because although Opie’s attraction to the Quaker ethos clearly reveals itself in her 1804 *Adeline Mowbray or The Mother and Daughter*, the author did not formally convert until 1825. In fact, during the revolutionary decade Opie was a firm part of the Godwin circle. Opie’s upper middle-class father, a progressive thinking surgeon, raised his daughter in the radical dissenting tradition (Spender, *Mothers* 119), and when the young woman arrived in London, Opie befriended Godwin, Holcroft, and Wollstonecraft, among other revolutionaries—some

even say Godwin proposed to her (Spender, *Mothers* 317)—before marrying the painter John Opie in 1798 (M. Butler 121). As Roxanne Eberle has recently demonstrated, Opie's letters during the 1790s clearly identify the female writer as a radical sympathizer (121).

During this period, prior to her conversion to Quakerism, Opie also readily professed admiration for Mary Wollstonecraft (Spender, *Mothers* 317), and *Adeline Mowbray* is commonly accepted as a novel based on Wollstonecraft's life. Raised to be a free thinker and progressive philosopher, the eponymous heroine considers legally sanctioned marriage to be useless and unnecessary, and she consequently chooses to live with her lover, Glenmurray, only to come to repent her poor judgement and abandon her unconventional principles. The similarities to Wollstonecraft's life are unmistakable; Glenmurray, the philosopher from whom Adeline learns the doctrine of free love, is clearly a type of Godwin figure who, like the actual rational theorist, wishes to sacrifice his principles and marry his lover when she becomes pregnant. Adeline and Glenmurray's tale also recalls Wollstonecraft's well-known affair with Gilbert Imlay; Wollstonecraft and her American partner considered themselves husband and wife by rational rather than by legal standards (Spender, *Mothers* 318-19). Because Adeline as a Wollstonecraftian figure is punished for her rational confrontation with standard morality and eventually changes her radical opinions in order to reconcile herself with God and the world, critics historically have tended to read the novel as an attack on the Godwinian attitude to marriage, as an anti-Jacobin "cautionary tale" which, according to Marilyn Butler, serves as "A striking example of the insidious spread of reaction . . . demonstrat[ing] how fully liberals now came back into the conformist fold" (121). Although as Eberle explains, "Questions about Opie's own political position have been at issue from the time of *Adeline Mowbray's* publication," the novel itself was widely read in the nineteenth century as a critique of radical theory (124).<sup>1</sup> Opie's sympathetic portrait of Adeline may indicate a recognition of Wollstonecraft's "sincerity and essential clean-mindedness" (MacCarthy 443), but the author's

refusal to condone Adeline's moral actions seems to identify the novel as anti-revolutionary.

Only recently have critics begun to recognize the disruptive undercurrents of Opie's narrative. Opie was one of the most prominent fiction writers of the first two decades of the nineteenth century, considered second in her day only to Maria Edgeworth among new female authors (Kelly, *English Fiction* 83),<sup>2</sup> and according to Gary Kelly, Opie's reputation remained constant until Jane Austen grew in popularity (*English Fiction* 83-84). This connection of Opie and Austen seems apt because although Ann Jones implies that the two writers appealed to different generations in the early nineteenth century due to their contrasting styles (77), I see a similarity in their discursive approaches; like the canonically approved Austen, Opie speaks with a double voice, appearing conventional, at times even apolitical, yet engaging with significant public issues through indirection, irony, and strategic complicity, the consequent ambiguity allowing her text to appeal to widely divergent political audiences. Recent critical responses to *Adeline Mowbray* have begun to acknowledge the complexity of Opie's discourse.<sup>3</sup> Eleanor Ty argues that although Opie may seem to write in support of the anti-Jacobins, certain textual elements, such as the exposition of social hypocrisy, suggest "an underlying sympathy for revolutionary advocates," so that these multiple views deny the reader a single, comfortable, solid position (29-30). Roxanne Eberle goes further to suggest that while offering Adeline's self-condemnation to contemporary readers as evidence of an indictment of radical philosophy, Opie continually introduces alternative readings of the heroine's life (140) in order to expose "the self interest implicit in both radical and conservative prescriptions about female education and citizenship" (123-24). In a more general sense, both Claudia Johnson and Katherine Sobba Green propose that women like Opie offer caricatured portraits of the "freakish feminist" (Johnson, *Jane Austen* 19) or impossible "Amazon" (K. Green 105), in this case Adeline's mother Editha, as the gesture of containment which allows the author to "obtain a hearing for subversive or radical discourse that would otherwise be unspeakable to her constituency" (K. Green

105). In his turn Gary Kelly suggests that “the representation of transgression” in Opie’s fiction “outweighs and overbalances the official moral” of anti-radical religious conversion (“Revolutionary and Romantic Feminism” 122), indicating that as in Hays’s work, although I would suggest in subtler fashion, Opie’s sympathetic and appealing portrayal of excess invites a reading that subverts the novel’s overt ideology.

Of the few critics who explore *Adeline Mowbray*, however, even those who recognize the novel’s intricacy tend to focus almost exclusively on the issue of free love and marriage. Although legal and moral unions certainly constitute a central concern in the text, I read the novel as being as much or more about education, specifically rational education. Despite the conservative and moralistic tone of the novel, Opie joins her radical feminist predecessors in promoting a balanced pedagogy for women, in supporting women’s access to masculine as well as feminine education, but Opie deviates from these other women writers by reconstructing her culture’s version of masculine rather than feminine schooling (in a manner far beyond Hays’s criticism of Mr Francis); that is, she rewrites rationality itself. As Wollstonecraft discriminates between excessive and true sensibility, Opie draws a distinction between abstract and worldly rationality, rejecting theoretical reasoning in favor of a rationality connected to the specific historical moment, to humanity and society. In so doing, she voices a clear criticism of conservatives and radicals alike for the disparity between their theory and practice, but, more significantly, she reveals a flaw central to radical theory itself; based on abstract rationality that fails to consider the individual’s specific worldly existence, radical theory cannot translate productively into social reality, and Opie’s representation of free love becomes the instance, the example of abstract rational principles necessarily failing to function effectively in operation. Through the primarily virtuous, albeit misguided, Adeline, Opie refuses to reject radical philosophy in principle, even privileging right rationality as the key to moral conversion, but she denies the theory’s viability in execution, representing suffering as the only possible consequence



of free love for the individual in contemporary social circumstances, especially when that individual is a woman. Although lauded in her day as a teller of moral tales (Kelly, "Discharging Debts" 198), the ostensibly conservative and moralistic Opie, rather than denying radical, masculine rationality, rewrites it from a worldly position, from a position of specificity, in order to challenge contemporary presumptions of gender construction and women's education.

As the novel's subtitle indicates, the central relationship in Opie's tale is between mother and daughter, Editha Mowbray and Adeline, and as the first several chapters reveal pedagogy is key to this relationship. Editha is born of wealthy, upper middle-class parents, the Woodvilles, who embrace their young "genius" (7) as their "idol," willingly nurturing her "egotism" (1). Ironically, the indulgence these fashionable parents extend to their impressionable daughter takes the form of a rational, masculine education. From a paternal aunt Editha learns "a love of free inquiry" (1), and she quickly discovers that "For her, history, biography, poetry, and discoveries in natural philosophy, had few attractions, while she pored with still unsatisfied delight over abstruse systems of morals and metaphysics, or new theories in politics" (2). Her hungry intellect never satiated by the usual feminine fodder, the young Editha enjoys a masculine education in form and content. Exploring classical subjects and intricate, theoretical discourses through penetrating analysis, she receives a rational schooling unlike most other women of her day.

However, instead of helping Editha develop into the responsible female citizen envisioned by Wollstonecraft, this masculine pedagogy renders the adult Editha useless and self-absorbed. The narrator explains:

Fatal and unproductive studies! While, wrapt in philosophical abstraction, she was trying to understand a metaphysical question on the mechanism of the human mind, or what constituted the true nature of virtue, she suffered day after day to pass in the culpable neglect of positive duties; and while imagining systems for the good of society, and the furtherance of general philanthropy, she allowed individual suffering in her neighbourhood to pass unobserved and unrelieved. While professing her unbounded love for the great family of the world, she suffered her own family to pine under the consciousness of her neglect; and viciously devoted

those hours to the vanity of abstruse and solitary study, which might have been better spent in amusing the declining age of her venerable parents, whom affection had led to take up their abode with her. (2-3)

Editha may be able to exercise her reasoning capacities, but because she limits her intellectual inquiry to theories and abstractions, her abstruse rational indulgences render her “unproductive” as a woman in the world. Lost in her “solitary” study, isolated from social reality, Editha neglects her “positive duties,” meaning her feminine responsibilities such as managing her family and home and offering charity to her community, in order to write a theoretical treatise on “a perfect system of education” for Adeline (7). She disregards what the Quaker minister Mrs Pemberton, as moral barometer in the novel, defines as “practical benevolence” (255) in favor of theoretical speculations. Such unworldly rationality renders Editha all “abstraction and apparent coldness” (7), a woman who has to learn “to feel like a true and affectionate mother” (257). Like Hays’s Mr Francis, Editha is out of balance, all abstract rationality devoid of feeling, but as a woman, a mother, and a teacher of the next generation, her faults seem much more insidious.<sup>4</sup> Editha is corrupted by her “habits of abstraction” (2), a recurring phrase used by Opie to define Mrs Mowbray, so that her faulty rational education significantly affects her relationship with her daughter and the novel’s heroine, Adeline.

As Adeline’s mother, Editha is also a teacher, and the older woman schools her young daughter in the abstract, rational discourses Editha so values. She subjects Adeline to her “experimental philosophy” (3) so that Adeline is weaned on masculine discourses, reading Rousseau’s *Contrat Social* but not his *Julie*, Voltaire’s *Brutus* but never his romances (57), and such intellectual studies include Frederic Glenmurray’s radical treatise against marriage (14). Yet despite such unconventional tutelage, Adeline does not dissolve into uselessness and abstraction like her mother because of the influence of Adeline’s grandmother, Mrs Woodville. Concluding that Adeline is not a “genius” like Editha (7), the traditionally-minded, non-intellectual grandmother tutors Adeline in the useful feminine virtues, offering her personal expertise in domesticity to the young

girl as a corrective to the “strange education” (28) Adeline receives at the hands of her mother. In short order Adeline becomes “usefully employed, and thus beloved and respected, because actively benevolent” (8), able even at a young age to manage her family and home, to minister to the infirm, and to nurture feminine affection. When Mrs Woodville dies, therefore, Adeline may pursue with renewed vigor the “abstruse speculations” of her mother (13), but such theorizing cannot negate Adeline’s practical abilities. Any other deficiencies in her education are later corrected by Glenmurray (Eberle 136), who introduces his lover to “general literature,” including histories, biographies, poetry, and novels, while teaching her French and Italian on their travels (68). Consequently, what Adeline receives is a balanced education, a productive schooling in masculine as well as feminine discourses and virtues.

As a result of such pedagogy, Adeline represents a balanced gender construct, a useful and virtuous reconciliation of rational masculinity and practical femininity, and throughout the novel she is valued for such hybridity. Adeline sees herself as a woman who, while fulfilling “every feminine duty,” has “a right to be an author, a politician, and a philosopher” (15), and her sentiments are echoed in the response of one of Adeline’s earliest and only friends, Dr Norberry, a character who, according to Gary Kelly, is a fictional representation of Opie’s father (“Amelia Opie” 10). The moralistic and well-intentioned doctor, who sees easily through the façade of Editha’s rational egotism, feels for Adeline not only affection, but also “veneration; for she appeared to him to unite various and opposing excellencies. Though possessed of taste and talents, she was skilled in the minutest details of housewifery and feminine occupations” (16); Dr. Norberry admires Adeline precisely for her blend of masculine and feminine skills and attributes. Even her physical appearance confirms her gender balance, being “tall, almost to a masculine degree” yet with a look and manner “so truly feminine” (18). As a woman valued as much for her mind as her heart, for her rational capacity as much as her feminine accomplishments, Adeline is Wollstonecraft’s civic woman, useful

of activity, pure of motive, moral of purpose. Despite her unconventional and ill-advised refusal to marry Glenmurray, the numerous references to Adeline's innocence and naïveté confirm the heroine's fundamental virtue, a basic morality born of her balanced nature.

Opie uses this representation of Adeline as a creature of innocence and virtue to construct a strong current of social criticism in the narrative. Raised to be a free thinker, Adeline fully embraces Glenmurray's rational defence of free love, and when forced to flee her mother's house as the "libertine gaze" (27) of her new stepfather, Sir Patrick O'Carrol, evolves into overt sexual advances, Adeline runs off with Glenmurray to whom she has already developed an attachment, choosing on principle to live with the philosopher outside of marriage. From this moment in the narrative Adeline's personal virtue is at odds with her social reputation, and the disparity exposes rampant hypocrisy in fashionable society. Again and again, the people Adeline and Glenmurray encounter initially applaud Adeline's goodness and virtue, but as soon as the couple's union is found to be illegal, opinions of the heroine change dramatically. For example, Mr Maynard, who is "astonished and delighted" at Adeline's intelligence (69), suggests that his two sisters would benefit from "the conversation of a lady" such as Adeline (70), but when Adeline's fallen status is revealed to him, his interest becomes purely sexual (78). Major Douglas, who is at first deeply impressed by Adeline's ingenuousness (80), sees fit to condemn the fallen woman as unfit for respectable society, even though his own sister is likewise living as a mistress (82). Much later, when Adeline attempts to support herself by running a day school, she finds herself beloved and respected by the entire village but only until her situation is revealed (167-68). Only morally conscious people like Mrs Pemberton (127-28) and Dr Norberry (93) can recognize a distinction between the person and her actions, acknowledging Adeline's basic morality as they regret the vice of her choices; the rest of society "finds it impossible to separate virtuous motives from seemingly licentious actions" (Eberle 127). Conservative society privileges jealous, conniving, small-minded shrews like Mrs Norberry

and her daughters over the principled and constant Adeline merely because Adeline does not submit to social prejudices by becoming a wife. Adeline's innocent eye and virtuous character thus expose the superficiality, inconsistency, and hypocrisy of a social order which values appearance over substance.

As defiant of social convention as are the rational philosophers in the novel, it is rather ironic that Opie accuses them of a strikingly similar limitation; like those members of the status quo, most of the free thinkers in *Adeline Mowbray* are also guilty of hypocrisy. Neither Editha nor Glenmurray practices the radical philosophies they both preach. Editha dedicates her intellectual life to studying rational theories, yet she is utterly "shocked" when Adeline thinks of acting in accordance with those principles (28). In attempting to correct her daughter's folly, Editha tells Adeline,

Little did I think that 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 trousers and graceful dress of the Turkish women; but I would not wear them myself, lest it should expose me to derision. (41-42)

To Editha, rational theories and systems are mere "amus[ements]," simple trifles worthy of comparison to matters of clothing and ornamentation. Despite her intellectual pretensions, Editha is not a sincere rationalist; like Wollstonecraft's Darnford, Mrs Mowbray only plays at rational ideology without subscribing to radical principles. This "lover of novelty" (19) desires intellectual studies because they provide her with "the means of displaying her superiority over other women" (14), and any such advantage is vital to a woman who desires male attention as much as Mrs Mowbray. In blaming Adeline for attracting Sir Patrick's gaze, Editha reveals herself to be nothing more than a competitive, silly, vain coquette, concerned above all else with her own pleasure and, as the above passage indicates, with public opinion. In displacing criticism of the intellectual woman onto a ridiculous, faux rationalist like Editha instead of the far more impressive heroine, Opie complies with early nineteenth-century traditional critiques of the Amazonian female without

sacrificing her radical efforts at gender reconstruction.

More significant as a free thinker is Glenmurray because, unlike Editha, this philosopher's interest in rational theory is sincere. A man of some financial means "descended from an ancient family, and nearly allied to a noble one" (48), Glenmurray defies distinctions of birth and wealth to voice his reasoned attack on traditional institutions including marriage. Believing marriage to be wicked (14), Glenmurray privileges unions based on love and honor, and for his published radicalism he is largely shunned by respectable society. But when he meets and falls in love with Adeline and social necessity comes into conflict with his radical theory, Glenmurray shows himself all too willing to compromise his rational principles. After having fought a duel with Sir Patrick in defence of Adeline's honor, an activity which his theory also disparages, Glenmurray says, "Well; - so much for principle and consistency! Now, my next step must be to marry, and then I shall have made myself a complete fool, and the worst of all fools, - a man presuming to instruct others by his precepts, when he finds them incapable of influencing even his own actions" (36). Unlike Editha, Glenmurray is aware of the hypocrisy involved in acting against his principles, but although he regrets this discrepancy he will not rectify it; he will neither "retract" his assertions (Gonda 199) nor act in accordance with them. Until he dies Glenmurray wishes to marry Adeline and would do so except she remains loyal to his ideas. While he bemoans "how painful and mischievous he found in practice the principles which he admired in theory" (116), Adeline offers one reasoned argument after another why they must remain consistent in their convictions. Although Glenmurray's greater knowledge of the world makes him aware that Adeline would be judged most harshly by a superficial society for flouting convention, the narrator suggests that Glenmurray's motives in pursuing a legal union are far from selfless. The narrator explains, "Glenmurray thought that he was willing to marry Adeline merely for *her* sake! but I suspect it was chiefly for *his*" (38), since like any conventional man he wishes "to appropriate the fair treasure to himself," and he could never really own or

“monopoli[ze]” Adeline unless she becomes his wife (38). Afraid to leave Adeline without protection when he dies, Glenmurray finally attempts to marry her to his cousin, Charles Berrendale (154), so that, as Eberle explains, the man who “had once been determined to protect Adeline from the ‘licentious gaze’ of desiring men . . . now encourages it by ‘selling’ Adeline as a good nurse and housekeeper” (138). Like the members of the dominant society he challenges, Glenmurray falls prey to hypocrisy, a failing which seems worse in the radical philosopher since his reasoned efforts are intended to rectify the court-induced discrepancies, inequalities, and superficialities which obstruct cultural advancement.

In contrast with such overwhelming insincerity from all social camps, Adeline’s consistency and ingenuousness clearly confirm her moral superiority; only Adeline among the radical philosophers acts according to her rational principles. Unlike Editha who pursues intellectual activity to feed her egotism, Adeline is a sincere rationalist who “studies merely from the love of study” (15), a phrase which invokes the Jacobin overestimation of the appeal of reason as well as the traditional, apolitical scholar’s devotion to learning for its own sake. Based on her own reasoned analysis, Adeline subscribes to Glenmurray’s doctrine and accepts the philosopher’s challenge, although uttered less as a sincere request than as an intellectual volley, to be his “not according to the ties of marriage, but with no other ties or sanction than those of love and reason” (37). The young Miss Mowbray would willingly act upon her conviction in the name of God (37), believing like Hays’s Emma that her attachment is moral because singular since “It is the individuality of an attachment that constitutes its purity” (30), as well as in the name of society. Based on “incontrovertible” rational arguments, Glenmurray’s philosophy, Adeline argues, will “improv[e] the state of society” (92), and in order to effect such advancement she will not sacrifice her principles to social prejudice simply to ease her own way, but will “act independent of society, and serve it by our [her and Glenmurray’s] example even against its will” (116). Trying to stir Glenmurray to similar resistance

in the name of progress, she asks, “when can we hope to see society enlightened and improved, when even those who see and strive to amend its faults in theory, in practice tamely submit to the trammels which it imposes” (130). Only after Glenmurray’s death when her position as an unprotected fallen woman becomes untenable does Adeline finally succumb to social pressure and marry Berrendale, but even then she submits primarily in order to keep her word. Accosted by two men on the street after escaping the debauched lawyer, Langley, Adeline names Berrendale her future husband in order to escape imminent danger (181), and once spoken these words must become reality for the honest but naïve Adeline. Glenmurray and Editha may cultivate a distinction between theory and application, but Adeline consistently strives to make her philosophy practical.

In Adeline, then, Opie creates a Wollstonecraftian woman of powerful, masculine rationality combined with useful femininity, a woman of integrity, constancy, and innate virtue. Yet Adeline’s rational choice leads to suffering and ruin, and Mrs Pemberton, the voice of morality in the novel, faults Adeline’s “cruelly defective” education at the hands of her mother for her fall (257). Because Adeline receives, beyond her education in the feminine arts, a rigorous, intellectual schooling of the kind Wollstonecraft endorses in the *Vindication*, this representation of the heroine as a victim of her tutelage could seem an attack on Wollstonecraft’s pedagogical feminism. However, Adeline’s sympathetic portrayal suggests a discerning reconstruction rather than a simple rejection of female intellectual engagement in rational discourse. Opie’s attack is directed not at women and reasoned analysis in general—as I will demonstrate shortly, rationality plays a vital role in the reconciliation of the individual to God and society in the novel—but at the specific kind of rational education Adeline receives from her mother, instruction which proves faulty in both method and content. Mrs Pemberton informs Editha that she erred in neglecting Adeline while writing a pedagogical manuscript to please her own vanity (257). Editha may have nourished Adeline’s mind by providing her with books, but she failed “to inquire into the impressions made on [her] daughter’s mind by the



books which she perused" (258). Adeline studied without guidance and in utter isolation, her only visitor Dr Norberry (14), and such solitary scholarship breeds abstraction and vulnerability. Mrs Pemberton explains that because Adeline "had not lived in the world," because she "did not mix in general society," the young girl could not make informed judgements about social realities and the significance of worldly opinions (258); she could not assess properly the implications of her abstract musings, however rational, when put into worldly practice. The resulting idealism may render Adeline's innocent narrative perspective a useful means by which to expose the vices and follies of the surrounding society, but such naïveté eventually destroys the heroine. By thus diagnosing the flaws in Adeline's intellectual development, Opie attempts to rewrite masculine, rational education for women, arguing for a schooling that privileges worldly rationality rather than simply abstract theory.

More pointedly, Adeline's naïveté may constitute the basis of her intellectual attraction to radical philosophy, but as this distinction between worldly and abstract rationality suggests, the more pervasive difficulty according to the narrative resides in radical ideology itself. Unlike Glenmurray and Editha, Adeline is a dedicated philosopher who puts her radical theory into practice, yet her sincere efforts fail to bring happiness and progress because the theory upon which she acts is based on abstract rather than worldly rationalism and consequently does not translate well into practice, into specific, resistant historical circumstances. As suggested above, Adeline defines the goal of rational philosophy as the advancement of society. She tells Glenmurray, therefore, that "you are to be governed by no other law but your desire to promote general utility, and are not to think at all of the interest of an individual" (67). In true Godwinian fashion Adeline believes in the necessity of the individual using his or her freedom to act in the best interest of society.<sup>5</sup> But as Glenmurray eventually realizes, what is "alluring in theory" can prove to be "pernicious in practice" (152). Beginning to repent his impertinence in publishing his radical tract when still so young and

immature, Glenmurray says,

I will own that some of my ideas are changed; and that, though I believe those which are unchanged are right in theory, I think, as the mass of society could never *at once* adopt them, they had better remain unacted upon, than that a few lonely individuals should expose themselves to certain distress, by making them the rules of their conduct. You, for instance, you, my Adeline, what misery —! (153)

Glenmurray, and through him Opie, refuses to disclaim the validity in principle of his radical theory of social change. The problem, however, is that the philosophy, born of abstract rationalism, fails to account for the actual consequences that result for the specific individual living according to that radical ideology within a conservative, actively hostile environment. Progress comes one individual at a time rather than as an immediate and global transformation of the society as a whole. As a result, the lone individual acting upon his or her radical convictions, however rational, will suffer the judgement and punishments imposed by the dominant order.

Therefore, although Katherine Sobba Green may argue that Opie “was interested in correcting William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft’s notions of free love” (110), I suggest that this attack serves as the instance of a more fundamental critique of radical rationality itself. Free love constitutes an example of radical theory’s inability to translate productively into concrete, historical circumstances because of its abstract rationalism. Opie may challenge radicals and conservatives alike for their hypocrisy, but the more significant criticism is directed at the flawed basis of early nineteenth-century radical philosophy which, while legitimate in theory, provokes immediate, individual suffering rather than general happiness in social reality. With subtle skill and innovation, Opie attempts to reconstruct rationality, that capacity to reason which forms the basis of masculine education and radical ideology, from a worldly position of specificity.

Of those free-thinking individuals who must endure the torments of living their radical philosophies, Opie singles out women as being in the most distress and danger. In the above passage Glenmurray may recognize Adeline’s personal “misery,” but Opie goes further, using Adeline to

represent the particularly precarious position of all women in relation to radical theory and social change. For his philosophy Glenmurray may be ostracized from respectable society, “forced to live a life of solitude” (21), but Adeline is in actual physical and sexual danger. Because society constructs women as the objects of male desire, Adeline is continually threatened by men—such as her stepfather and her lawyer—who take her unconventional beliefs as justification for sexual license. As the worldly Major Douglas astutely points out, “The opinion of the world is everything to a woman” (85), and, as a result, the female sex simply cannot afford unconventional intellectual beliefs. Opie’s narrative thus reveals the sexual double standard inherent in dominant society; the novel clearly contrasts the extreme repercussions felt by Adeline for her sexual conduct as opposed to the experience of Berrendale, who for his extra-marital affair with a servant merely feels a need to be more attentive to Adeline (Agress 154-55). At the same time, Opie also exposes the sexual bias of radical ideology.<sup>6</sup> Because libertines like Sir Patrick read the doctrine of free love as a “euphemistic disguise” for licentiousness (Eberle 131), women like Adeline are at physical risk, beyond the merely social discomfort experienced by male radicals, when those women act upon their convictions in conventional society. Opie’s narrative demonstrates the failure of radical ideology to address this real danger. In *Adeline Mowbray*, then, Opie offers a critique of early nineteenth-century radicalism and rational philosophy that is specifically feminist in its exposure of idealism’s gender-blindness and the uneven distribution of calumny and exploitation.

Yet in finding rational philosophy wanting in application, Opie does not align herself wholeheartedly with political conservatism. On the contrary, her discerning analysis identifies right reason as the key to moral conversion and social cohesion, and in the end Adeline actually defends radical theory even while conforming to traditional moral standards. As Adeline comes more and more into contact with the world, she gradually starts to see the error of her ways. When the servant, Mary Warner, insults Miss Mowbray by calling her a “kept mistress” (121), the honest Adeline finds

herself evading the sickly Glenmurray's questions as to the cause of her upset, and her confusion leads to the acknowledgement: "there must be something radically wrong in a situation which exposes one to such a variety of degradations" (122). This glimmer of recognition comes at an apt moment, just prior to Adeline's first meeting with Mrs Pemberton whose Quaker influence will prove significant for Adeline's moral development. (That Maynard earlier describes Adeline's dress to be as "neat as a Quaker" implies a moral connection between the two women which foreshadows the heroine's transformation [76]). Shortly thereafter Glenmurray dies and Adeline loses her "reason" for six months (164), a period of respite which clears the intellectual way for Adeline to begin to doubt her principles (170-71). As she enters the world in an attempt to support herself, seeing firsthand the negative effects her philosophy has for the individual woman when put into practice, she soon begins to embrace her suffering as just atonement for her crime which she now identifies as "leaving her mother and living with Glenmurray" (187). Her moral conversion is at last complete when she asserts the "fallacy of [her] past opinions," claiming that she married Berrendale not from necessity, but from a change of principle; Adeline finally conforms to the status quo's perception of marriage. However, she does so as a result not of blind faith or religious ecstasy, but of "rational conviction" (220). Adeline turns toward conventional morality, as she had once embraced radical theory, based on reasoned analysis, not unthinking acceptance. Opie thus identifies rationality, Adeline's masculine intellect, as the source not only of Adeline's fall, but also of her salvation.

Further, Adeline's "rational conviction" concludes that the source of her difficulties resides not in her radical philosophy, but in society itself. She says, "the painful situation in which I have been placed, I might attribute, not to the fallacy of the system on which I have acted, but to those existing prejudices in society which I wish to see destroyed" (221). Even as her moral conversion leads her to repent her past actions, Adeline will not condemn Glenmurray's radical speculations on love and marriage, suggesting that his ideas are not wrong; they simply cannot work in a society beset

by prejudice. In support of Adeline's reasoned assessment, Opie offers several powerfully negative representations of legalized marriage in contrast to Adeline and Glenmurray's joyfully illegal union. Sir Patrick and Editha's marriage is not only mercenary but also bigamous; Glenmurray's cousins make a brief appearance in the text to represent a married couple revelling in infidelity and superficial appearances (131); even the good Dr Norberry is trapped, as Eberle defines it, in a "bad 'good' marriage" (150, n. 36), ceaselessly tormented by a demanding, jealous shrew of a wife. Adeline and Glenmurray, on the other hand, live happily and lovingly in "mutual benefit and assistance" (68). This contrast between legal and illegal unions is of course most striking in Adeline's relationships with Glenmurray and Berrendale. Although alike in appearance, the two cousins are opposite in principle; unlike the radical philosopher, the self-indulgent Berrendale has neither beliefs nor scruples. A miserly, self-indulgent, weak, unfaithful tyrant, Berrendale makes Adeline's life a nightmare, representing her as his mistress instead of his wife before finally repudiating her in order to marry a West Indian heiress (197). Clearly, Opie represents Adeline's and Glenmurray's illicit union as "superior to any other heterosexual relationship in the novel" (Eberle 136). As Ty concludes, Opie may advocate marriage as an institution, but she "demonstrates its deficiencies at the same time" (29). This double gesture belies any attempt to define Opie's criticism of radical theory as purely reactionary.

Of course, before concluding her tale Opie does meet the romantic demands of the genre by offering the reader one ostensibly proper, happy, legal marriage; she weds the supposedly reformed Colonel Mordaunt to the virtuous Emma Douglas. But even this union is not without ambiguity. A self-confessed libertine, Mordaunt is "not a *marrying man*" when he first meets Adeline at Bath, and because he feels a great passion for the worthy Miss Mowbray, he flees town in order to escape the lure of her charms (21). Reappearing during Adeline's troubles with her husband, the Colonel presents himself a reformed man, ready to marry and willing to help Adeline gain for her daughter

the child's rightful inheritance as Berrendale's heir (215). Eventually drawn to Emma Douglas for her defence of Adeline and her resemblance to the virtuous heroine (233-34), Mordaunt finally weds Emma before his exit from the novel. If this union is, as Eberle claims, the "one conventionally 'happy' marriage" in the novel (141), the fact that Opie displaces representation of a companionate marriage onto minor characters qualifies any supposed endorsement of social convention. More significantly, in learning to love Emma for the goodness of spirit she shares with Adeline, Mordaunt eventually raises Emma to superior status because the pure Miss Douglas, unlike the heroine, "never erred" (241). Mordaunt's reformation, his perfect marriage, thus subscribes to the social prejudice that represses Adeline, and Opie clearly condemns all such facile judgement. In a strategic gesture of seeming complicity, Opie apparently presents the requisite happy marriage before returning to the central relationship, that of Adeline and her mother, but Mordaunt and Emma's marriage seems a matter of narrative indirection to justify or disguise Adeline's subversive defence of radical ideology and rational philosophy.

Therefore, Adeline does convert in the end, returning to the conformist fold by privileging conventional over radical perceptions of the moral and social necessity of marriage, but Opie constructs enough ambiguity in the text to challenge traditionally reductive readings of the narrative. In fact, Adeline's own rationale for her conversion seems highly suspect. In explaining to Mordaunt her new principles in support of legal unions, Adeline asserts, "I have no doubt that there is a great deal of individual suffering in the marriage state, from a contrariety of temper and other causes; but I believe that the mass of happiness and virtue is certainly increased by it. Individual suffering, therefore, is no argument for the abolition of marriage" (220). In this reasoned passage Adeline suggests that the "mass" happiness resulting from legalized marriage outweighs any suffering experienced by the individual, personal misery which, she has "no doubt," is "great." Such logic seems deeply ironic, certainly difficult to accept at face value, since, as demonstrated above, Opie

elsewhere takes great pains to criticize radical philosophy, the principles Adeline now purports to reject in favor of conventional ideology, precisely for the very same oversight, for ignoring individual torment in service of the greater social and moral good. Adeline's second attempt to explain the rational basis of her conversion is more persuasive, suggesting that marriage is necessary for the education of children and thus the "welfare of the community" (243). She explains in Wollstonecraftian fashion that unions based on affections rather than passions are easier to sustain, that without such stable couplings "unbridled licentiousness" would lead parents to neglect their children's education, and that the consequent lack of morals and instruction would threaten the human race and destroy "the whole fabric of civilized society" (243-44). This argument seems plausible in light of Opie's concern with worldly rationality, her argument that a proper masculine, rational education must connect intellectual theorizing to specific social circumstances; children should be educated to be useful to their community. However, her previous assertion supporting marriage for its own sake rather than for the children leaves room for much speculation and thus qualifies Adeline's conversion.

In the same letter in which Adeline explains her theory of marriage and children's education, the heroine wishes for her own death, believing she can be most useful in her grave since by living she can serve as neither a virtuous example nor a suitable warning for her daughter, little Editha. Because a fallen woman can expect no other fate, convention dictating that she cannot live to re-enter respectable society, the narrative seems to draw toward a close on a securely traditional note with Adeline's requisite demise; once again, however, radical undercurrents disrupt discursive stability. Adeline explains that she fears should she live, society would "forget [her] past errors, in the sincerity of [her] repentance," and she might therefore serve as a "dangerous example" for little Editha by demonstrating that "one false step may be retrieved" (244). Better Adeline should die and show her daughter that in spite of external redemption, one can never forgive oneself (245).

Shortly thereafter Adeline writes to her mother, now also converted through adversity to a life of benevolence and charity (255), begging the older woman to take in little Editha upon Adeline's death and "teach her to be slow to call the experience of ages contemptible prejudices; teach her no opinions that can destroy her sympathies with general society" (266). Adeline's rejection of her former life, physical and intellectual, seems absolute. But if Adeline's body dies, her words live on, and the novel clearly reveals the incendiary power of the written word. After Glenmurray's death, to support herself Adeline not only teaches, but also writes hymns and tales for children (176), and she continues her literary activities during her marriage and after her abandonment by Berrendale (187). As Eberle points out, "The text never suggests that imparting morality to young minds is an inappropriate task for the heroine" (139). Indeed, Adeline may not be able to teach school anymore, but her written works remain to instruct the young as she was once educated by rational discourses, to influence the next generation even after her demise. Adeline may die the appropriate death of the fallen woman, but she is not silenced.

As the narrative draws to its conclusion, furthermore, Opie leaves the reader with a vision not of the blissful heterosexual coupling usually demanded by domestic fiction, but of a powerful female community, suggesting that despite the text's ostensible argument in favor of marriage, *Adeline Mowbray* is largely and defiantly about female relationships. Of the many men in the novel, the major figures are either rakes or negatively feminized males whose functional significance resides in their ability to interrupt female alliances. Sir Patrick, whose deceit (he tells Editha that he duels with Glenmurray because the philosopher insulted her) and licentiousness divide Adeline from her mother, Berrendale, whose denial of his marriage to Adeline keeps the lonely woman from respectable female company, and Colonel Mordaunt, whose sincere passion for Adeline (latter transposed to Emma Douglas) cannot entirely qualify his desire to make her his lover since he finds her to be "not over-scrupulous in her ideas" (216), are among the many libertines who exploit women



for their own mercenary and lascivious purposes. In contrast, Glenmurray cannot help but appear the “noble hero” Gary Kelly determines him to be (“Amelia Opie” 9), yet from the moment he enters the text until his death, the radical philosopher is sickly, weak, and ineffective, his deathbed obsession with a pineapple exposing the pathos and extremity of his effeminization. Of the major male figures, only the good Dr Norberry remains with the women at the end, but his presence is possible precisely because he is entirely ineffective as a man. Shrew-beaten by his overbearing wife, Dr Norberry may be astute enough to recognize Editha’s vanity (100) and Adeline’s worth (93), but the poor doctor cannot act upon his convictions, unable to grant Adeline asylum near him for fear of his wife and daughters’ jealous wrath (114). In his self-appointed role as conciliator, Dr Norberry proves wholly ineffectual, his efforts actually hindering rather than helping Adeline in her attempt to reconcile with her mother prior to Editha’s formal disavowal of her daughter (112). Continually dissolving into tears whenever overcome by his emotions, Dr Norberry is, in his own words, “an old woman” (272). With such men populating the immediate environment, Adeline’s negative assessment of marriage seems overwhelmingly justified. Rather than drawing attention for their own personal development, such men, libertines and negatively feminized males alike, prove significant mainly in their influence over the female relationships in the novel, specifically that of mother and daughter.

From the opening pages of the text, Adeline seeks above all else, above even heterosexual love, female affection and sympathy, dedicating herself to her rational studies in the first place in order to try to earn her mother’s love (13). In her efforts to gain her mother’s affection, Adeline agrees first never to see Glenmurray (42), and when Sir Patrick makes it impossible for her to keep this promise, she offers to marry her lover if only her mother would ask (92). The sincere girl easily refuses Glenmurray’s constant appeals to forfeit her principles against marriage, but for her beloved mother, and later for her unborn child (135), Adeline would condescend to wed; she would sacrifice

both her love and her principles for her mother's sympathy. After Editha utters her fateful oath, vowing never to reconcile with Adeline until the girl is brought low and on her deathbed, meeting the conditions of Editha's curse becomes Adeline's central concern. When hearing of Berrendale's desire to take a new wife in the West Indies, for instance, Adeline reacts not with anger or despair, but with joy at the possibility such a blow offers for a reconciliation with her mother, proclaiming, "I am now forsaken, despised and disgraced!"—and instantly she wrote to Mrs Mowbray a letter calculated to call forth all her sympathy and affection" (203). In fact, Jane Spencer proposes that Adeline's life "becomes a series of self-punishing moves to fulfill the conditions her mother has laid down for a reconciliation," suggesting that because Adeline's final illness is given "no organic cause," it seems self-willed, yet another attempt to precipitate her mother's forgiveness (208). Adeline's experience suggests a primary need for female sympathy and affection.

The major obstacle to this sense of community proves to be, interestingly enough, not men, despite their roles in dividing women in the novel, but rather women themselves. Editha disowns her daughter not from any sense of principle or disappointment, but primarily because of her jealousy at Sir Patrick's obvious preference for the young Adeline; as Dr Norberry astutely points out, Editha errs in placing her "selfish sense of rivalry" over her maternal affections (104). Again and again in the novel, Opie exposes the destructiveness of female rivalry in characters from the Norberry and Maynard women who writhe with jealousy at Adeline's intellectual superiority, to Mary Warner who turns on Adeline because Miss Mowbray insults the servant's vanity (205), to Anna Woodville whose poverty provides the rationale for her efforts to supplant Adeline as Editha's rightful heir. As a fallen woman Adeline is shunned by respectable ladies in general, and she spends her time "pin[ing] for the society of amiable women" (71). But if women can destroy one another, they can also save each other. From the protective Mrs Selby who offers Adeline a home when the heroine is ill with small-pox, to the devoted servant Savanna who supports Adeline steadfastly through all

of her trials,<sup>7</sup> to the morally consistent Mrs Pemberton whose example affects Editha, Dr Norberry, as well as Adeline, women offer other women comfort and salvation, so that the basic movement of the novel is from female rivalry to community and sisterhood.

However, if this utopian vision of female unity confirms the novel's progressiveness, it also defines the limitations of those subversive efforts. The narrative depends for its resolution, much like Wollstonecraft's *Maria*, on representation of a redemptive female community, and as in the previous novel this withdrawal from the public to a private, feminine realm proves problematic. Upon Adeline's death the heroine leaves her daughter to a "powerfully redemptive triad" (Eberle 143) of women at Rosevalley in Editha, Savannah, and Mrs Pemberton. In her persuasive analysis of this "ideal community" (144), Roxanne Eberle explains that this "multi-faceted community of women" (144) owes its strength to Mrs Pemberton's piety, Savannah's defiance, and Editha's philanthropy, her ability to administer her finances in order to help other women like Miss Woodville (144-45). Interdependence, moral virtue, and economic power define this female collective which extends its acceptance to women of different backgrounds, including the fallen (Eberle 144-145). However, like *Maria's* isolated utopia, this female counter sphere, as Eberle explains, "posits an empowering space of freedom; yet it is a world which is entirely cut off from the masculine 'public sphere,'" so that the "intimacy of Rosevalley threatens to become the claustrophobic space of the 'domestic sphere' later in the century" (146); withdrawal means isolation and, consequently, beyond one's immediate, insulated, private environment, impotence. Although I fully agree with Eberle's assessment of the difficulties implicit in such social withdrawal, I find Opie's retreat slightly less problematic than Wollstonecraft's because Opie allows for a male presence in this female asylum, an inclusion which Eberle fails to acknowledge. Dr Norberry remains to attend Adeline on her deathbed, and even though he is "an old woman" (272), his male presence suggests that Opie's ideal community makes at least minimal attempt to challenge patriarchal notions of separate spheres. Nevertheless, as in

*Maria, Adeline Mowbray's* withdrawal into an isolated, primarily female community determines the limits of the novel's radicalism.

But such a limitation serves as only minimal qualification of a deeply challenging and disruptive text which, unlike the novels by Fenwick and Hays, does not appear to be overtly subversive. As Gary Kelly suggests, *Adeline Mowbray's* historical popularity can be explained, in part, because the novel apparently "reinforced a version of the ideology and culture of patriarchy which men and women readers still very close to the decade of Revolution wanted and needed to have reinforced" ("Amelia Opie" 10). To early nineteenth-century as well as Victorian audiences, *Adeline Mowbray* appeared a moralistic warning against radical promiscuity, a religious argument in favor of respectable domesticity with all the necessary elements of sentimental fiction. Yet Opie allows enough ambiguity in her text for us to read these seemingly conservative gestures as moments of strategic complicity which mask her radical bias. Opie uses a conventionally acceptable critique of free love to rewrite radical, masculine rationality and, through it, rational education for women. Like Fenwick, Hays, and Wollstonecraft, Opie argues for a balanced education, and hence gender construct, for women; through *Adeline*, Opie demonstrates that women need to be schooled in useful femininity as well as masculine rationality, but she insists that that rationality be connected to the specific historical moment, to the individual and humanity, rather than remaining merely abstract and theoretical in its speculations. In arguing for this gender balance for women, Opie thus attempts to reconstruct masculine education by rewriting rationality from a position of worldly specificity, thereby offering a most discerning assessment of intellectual engagement as constructed in the early 1800s. In defending as much as assailing radical ideology and rational philosophy, Opie creates a skillfully crafted, challenging novel which helps bring feminist agitation concerning women's education into the nineteenth century.

Like Opie, Hannah More has been defined by history as a conservative writer; in fact, most critical studies tend to represent the Evangelical More as morally restrictive and politically reactionary. Despite such reductionist identification of the coincidence of Opie and More's politics, their two novels about women's education, *Adeline Mowbray* and *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, seem rather unlike. If Opie's novel can be seen as a female-centred text, More's 1808 *Coelebs* appears decidedly male; that is, More approaches the issue of women's education from an overtly masculinist point of view. She attempts to mask her female authorship by publishing her novel anonymously, even attributing the preface to her male narrator, Coelebs, who also, as he reveals at the close of his long discourse, hides behind a pseudonym. Such narrative strategy foregrounds Coelebs as a type of everyman, a country gentleman who reluctantly offers his journal not only to the general reader, but specifically "to young men engaged in the same pursuit" as the putative author (*Coelebs* I:vi),<sup>8</sup> that quest being the search for a wife who is the ideal perfection of womanhood. Because Evangelical doctrine privileged the religious household as the basis of Christian practice, finding the right partner proved essential to More's religion (Hall 87), and to highlight the significance of this matrimonial equation, More "inverts the usual courtship schema" by representing a man's, rather than a woman's, search for a mate (K. Green 113). Scouring London and the English countryside for a suitable woman to no avail, Coelebs turns to his father's old friend, Mr Stanley, as an advisor, and much of the text is given to Mr Stanley's wise counsel on matters of religion and education. Resisting his desire for Mr Stanley's eldest daughter, Lucilla, until he is sure of the heroine's worth, Coelebs finally decides that this girl, whom the pious father has educated to perfection, embodies Coelebs's strict ideal, even though the much-lauded Lucilla speaks for no more than a few pages throughout the entire two volume work in proof of her suitability (Ty 17). Written from such a clearly male perspective, *Coelebs* approaches female pedagogy in a manner distinct from the other works in my investigation, yet the concerns are similar; like Wollstonecraft, Fenwick, Hays, and

Opie, More criticizes customary educational practices in order to reform early nineteenth-century women's pedagogy and gender constructions.

Compared to the other women writers in this analysis, except for Wollstonecraft, More has been the most studied of late. According to Mitzi Myers, More was "Arguably the most influential woman of her day" ("Tracts" 265), and Katherine Rogers describes the early nineteenth-century writer as "perhaps the most admired intellectual woman of her period" (140). Although *Coelebs* is her only novel, More was the most prolific female writer of nonfiction during the last quarter of the eighteenth and first quarter of the nineteenth century (Agress 48), and her works, Lynne Agress claims, were "said to be, during the nineteenth century, better known in America than the plays of Shakespeare" (48). A playwright, Bluestocking, and member of the Johnsonian circles during the latter part of the eighteenth century (Browne 174), More gained national fame as an educator for managing and teaching in a school at Bristol with her sisters (Leranbaum 285). After her conversion to Evangelicalism she became an acclaimed leader of the Sunday school movement for which she gained much prominence (Sutherland 41). As such an influential figure More has attracted some recent critical interest, but in terms of her literary works such attention has been directed primarily at her *Cheap Repository Tracts*, the late eighteenth-century series of religious writings in chapbook form intended to educate and pacify the working poor, and *Strictures On the Modern System of Female Education* (1799), a popular conduct book for ladies of the middling and upper ranks.<sup>9</sup> (She has also received some recent attention for serving as patron to the working-class poet, Ann Yearsley [Kowaleski-Wallace, *Their Father's Daughters* 3]). Other than scattered and brief acknowledgements, *Coelebs* remains relatively neglected in terms of sustained, critical investigation. Further, most discussions of More explore the political and cultural implications of her religiosity and morality, and feminist studies tend to focus on the writer's depiction of sex roles. In contrast, I want to focus on *Coelebs* and on the specific implications the educational reforms More proposes

hold for early nineteenth-century gender ideology, because the gender reconstructions implicit in her pedagogical proposals necessitate a reassessment of More's historical and (anti)feminist significance.

As a work of fiction *Coelebs* presents a particular challenge to the modern reader in that it all but lacks many of the most basic elements which audiences have come to expect of the novel form. Almost devoid of plot, *Coelebs* offers only the barest of narratives and hardly a hint of character development. For the most part, the novel functions as a series of religious debates, a gathering of sermons attended to by recurring figures and justified by Coelebs's quest for moral perfection in his future wife. Its style, argues Rogers, is "stupefyingly stilted" (140); indeed, Samuel Pickering describes it as "a creaky period piece" (90). At once a novel, a conduct book, and an educational tract (Richardson 190), *Coelebs*'s overt didacticism powerfully overrides any traces of story, thereby threatening to frustrate the most general attempts at literary analysis.

Nevertheless, *Coelebs* remains a significant novel that requires investigation both formally and thematically. In both *Strictures* (I:37-43), which provides the theory for the novel, and *Coelebs* (I:245), More voices the conventional Evangelical criticism of the potentially corrupting influence of circulating library novels, their ability "to inculcate acceptance of morally tainted values" (Evans 461). Ann Jones explains that the Evangelicals rejected the romantic notions as well as the revolutionary politics (and according to Gary Kelly, the false courtly culture [*Women, Writing, and Revolution* 118]) they saw being propagated in women's fiction, but, realizing that the public was determined to keep reading such novels, the Evangelicals decided to appropriate and rescript the literary form (9-10). In the preface to *Coelebs*, More asserts her participation in such discursive rehabilitation by explaining that the lack of conventional novelistic fare comprises a deliberate attempt to redefine the novel and reform the novel reader; she writes, "But to entertain that description of readers makes no part of my design" (I:viii). Instead, her explicit purpose in *Coelebs* is to educate, and for her efforts More was much applauded. The novel went through eleven editions

in just nine months, selling 30,000 copies in the United States by More's death in 1833 (Pickering 91), thereby becoming possibly the most popular novel of the first two decades of the nineteenth century (A. Jones 10).<sup>10</sup>

In fact, Samuel Pickering argues that while literary history has tended to embrace Sir Walter Scott as the author who made the novel both popular and respectable, such a claim "overlooks the preparatory importance of religious tracts and the phenomenal success enjoyed by Hannah More's *Coelebs*" (89). Pickering explains that people were excited at the novel's publication because they thought the combination of religion and fiction to be a new genre (93). Receiving mostly "enthusiastic" critical reviews (Pickering 91), *Coelebs* became "the first nineteenth century novel to be acclaimed by 'religious readers,'" convincing many doubters that "the novel could become a handmaiden to Christianity" (Pickering 89). In a more specific analysis of literary forms, Ina Ferris explains that More, with Maria Edgeworth and Jane West, helped develop the "proper novel" which functioned as a corrective to the "female reading" indicative of the circulating libraries (53). *Coelebs* thereby proved to the Evangelicals that the public would accept religious teaching if presented in even the barest guise of a story, so that subsequently it "became difficult for any but the most puritanical to object to all novels" (A. Jones 11-12). As a work of fiction *Coelebs* may lack literary merit according to twentieth-century critical standards, but its extreme success proved vital to the history of the novel.

But more than simply a literary artifact valuable for its contribution to the evolution of fiction, *Coelebs* is significant, I suggest, for its pedagogical analysis and its renegotiation of dominant gender constructions, reformist efforts which recall the work of More's radical feminist precursors despite her ostensibly conservative sexual politics. In the Preface *Coelebs* reveals the novel's mandate as twofold. On the one hand, the narrator intends to illustrate the "different shapes and shades of error" (I:x) of religious as well as irreligious members of society, errors "which are often



tolerated, justified, and in some instances systematized" (I:xi), in order to demonstrate that "religion may be brought to mix with the concerns of ordinary life, without impairing its activity, lessening its cheerfulness, or diminishing its usefulness" (I:xi). Beyond this Evangelical defence of morality, however, *Coelebs* also intends to expose the "defects [that] exist in fashionable education" (I:xi) as a means of proposing that "females of the higher class may combine more domestic knowledge with more intellectual acquirement, that they may be at the same time more knowing and more useful, than has always been thought necessary or compatible" (I:xi-xii). That is, More attempts to reconstruct contemporary notions of feminine education by replacing decorative accomplishments with domestic economy and, at the same time, granting women access to masculine pedagogy, or intellectual activity and engagement, in both form and content. To effect such a process, she attempts to create an alternative value system which reconfigures customary notions of intellect, extending her reformist epistemology to include men. However, because More retains a conservative belief in hierarchy, the possibility in her discourse turns to restriction so that in her novel can be detected early glimmers of what were to become repressive Victorian constructions of womanhood. Nevertheless, the point remains that if More applies her reformist agenda to different ends than her feminist predecessors, increasing women's intellectual opportunities to serve moral and masculinist ideologies rather than radical assertions of civil rights, the means through which she seeks cultural transformation, the specific educational reforms and gender reconstructions she proposes, are arguably similar.

Because of the overweening moral tenor of the novel, any analysis of *Coelebs* necessitates a basic understanding of Evangelical ideology as propagated in the early 1800s. Catherine Hall, in a useful analysis of the Evangelical movement and its implications for nineteenth-century culture, explains that this Low Church Anglican movement struggled from 1790-1820 after which it established itself as part of the dominant culture (78). The work of these Evangelicals, according to

Hall,

was primarily devoted to the furtherance of Evangelical principles in various political and social fields. They are best known for their contributory effort to the abolition of the slave trade and of slavery, their missionary activities both within and beyond England, and their influence on the foundation of Sunday schools and many other philanthropic and reforming institutions. (76)

In general, the Evangelicals set out to transform the national morality of Britain by providing a new model of usefulness, industry, and family to displace the dissipation and immorality of court culture (Hall 76-77). Their efforts were bolstered towards the turn of the century by the shift of Revolutionary events in France, the increasing violence seemingly proving atheism and revolution inseparable, as well as by the increasing threat of foreign invasion; in such turbulent times the Evangelical virtues of order, conservatism, and devotion to Church and state grew more and more appealing (A. Jones 8).

As this description suggests, the moralistic Evangelical movement was deeply implicated in politics and class relations. In the latter part of the eighteenth century More, who hailed from the margins of the gentry and professional classes (Kelly, "Romantic and Revolutionary Feminism" 117), joined the Clapham Sect whose members were leaders of the Evangelicals (Hall 76). The members of this moral group, Hall explains, "were neither old-style aristocrats nor new-style manufacturers," but professionals who had ties to the old mercantile bourgeoisie and landed aristocracy; consequently, they "came to be seen as representing the interests of England and of sections of the middle classes" while serving as a bridge between the traditional ruling classes and the aspiring middle ranks (80). Although they "believed in the traditional power of the aristocracy," they attacked upper-class morals and manners for laxness (Hall 78-79) as well as middle-class emulation of aristocratic licentious practices (Kelly, "Revolutionary and Romantic Feminism" 117). At the same time, the Evangelicals feared unrest in the lower orders. As the emerging laissez-faire economy created increasing class antagonism in the 1790s (Poovey, *Proper Lady* 9), the Evangelicals reacted

against revolutionary politics and writers like Paine, whose insistence on rights threatened lower-class stability (Sutherland 38-39). To contain the potential disruptiveness, the Evangelicals offered Christian morality, the privileging of spiritual salvation over worldly equality, as a means of rendering social protest and discontent impious or immoral (Pederson 96), a strategy which, as Mary Poovey explains, succeeded in quelling social turmoil in the early decades of the nineteenth century (34). Therefore, despite their conservative, paternalistic emphasis on upper-class responsibility for the morality and instruction of the poor, the Evangelical movement, and More as one of its members, participated in the embourgeoisement of the upper and working classes in early nineteenth-century Britain (Kelly, "Revolutionary and Romantic Feminism" 119). In helping to displace the cultural status quo with the emergent bourgeois ethic, the Evangelicals, as Kathryn Sutherland astutely points out, may have been loyalists politically, but culturally they were subversive (52).

Within this Evangelical project of national moral reform, both education and the proper role of women were key concerns, and More wrote prolifically on both issues. Because Evangelical doctrine asserted that children were born with a corrupt nature, and because the goal of education was defined as rectifying such faults, the Evangelicals sought to instruct the primarily ill-educated but increasingly literate working poor (Richardson 14). However, increasing working-class literacy seemed rather dangerous unless the lower orders were provided with moral and safe, rather than immoral and democratic, reading material (Kelly, "Popular Culture" 148). Therefore, between 1795 and 1797 More edited and published the *Cheap Repository Tracts*, over one hundred moral tales in popular chapbook form, fifty of which she wrote herself (Richardson 120). Consciously adopting the forms, styles, and distribution practices (chapbooks and broadsheets were typically sold by street hawkers and itinerant peddlars [Richardson 31]) of popular literature, More used her *Tracts* "to infiltrate and subvert" the working classes (Pederson 88) in order to effect moral reform and political stability.<sup>11</sup>

In *Coelebs* and *Strictures*, More extends this Evangelical concern with education to women as well as the middle and upper classes, directing her work toward properly educating domestic women of rank and fortune. Believing that sin is universal and that one need constantly struggle against such frailty, the Evangelicals idealized the home and family, a loving and protected environment in contrast to the hostile world beyond, as the best site to curb such sin, as the proper basis of religious life (Hall 82). With the growing prominence of mercantile capitalism relegating women to the home, the female sex became increasingly pivotal in maintaining this moral institution (Poovey, *Proper Lady* 9). To support this sexual division of labor, men at work in the world and women in the home as the glorified vanguards of morality, the Evangelicals believed that “the sexes are naturally distinct,” that “men and women are not equal” (Hall 82). The Evangelicals thus forcefully rejected feminist arguments for sexual equality, and as a firm believer in her faith, More did as well. A staunch anti-Jacobin, More sarcastically asserts,

The *rights of man* have been discussed, till we are somewhat wearied with the discussion. To these have been opposed with more presumption than prudence *the rights of woman*. It follows according to the natural progression of human things, that the next stage of that irradiation which our enlighteners are pouring in upon us as will produce grave descants on the *rights of children*. (*Strictures* I:135)

Believing in the natural, rather than cultural, distinction of the sexes, More finds the notion of women’s rights absurd, as illogical as granting children authority and independence, advising women instead to learn the value of submission to men (*Strictures* I:143). In attempting to persuade women to accept their customarily subordinate social role, More seems decidedly anti-feminist.

In fact, she directly opposes herself to Wollstonecraft and all radical women, privileging her work as defining an alternative stance. In a well-known letter to Horace Walpole in 1793, More wrote of her refusal even to read the *Vindication*, suggesting that “there is something fantastic and absurd in the very title,” and that “I am sure I have as much liberty as I can make good use of” (Roberts I:427). In defiance of Wollstonecraft’s incendiary discourse on women’s equality, More

continues: “To be unstable and capricious, I really think, is but too characteristic of our sex; and there is perhaps no animal so much indebted to subordination for its good behaviour as woman” (Roberts I:427). In *Strictures* she accuses Wollstonecraft of attempting to vindicate adultery in *The Wrongs of Woman*, and her complete rejection of female radicals in this polemical work (e.g. I:68-69, II:20) is given specific representation in *Coelebs* in the portrait of Miss Sparkes as a caricatured feminist. Still single at forty-five because of her reputation as “a wit and an Amazon” (*Coelebs* II:84) and because of her attraction to any talent or quality that is “not feminine” (*Coelebs* II:85), Miss Sparkes is too peculiar to be an acceptable domestic woman. “A scholar, and a huntress, a politician, and a warrior” (*Coelebs* II:84), Miss Sparkes has an easy, contrary, and as Mr Stanley points out, usually errant opinion on any topic which she immodestly voices at every opportunity. Her insistence on the value of “freedom of speech” clearly linking her with Jacobin ideology (*Coelebs* II:92), Miss Sparkes is represented as a foolish, outspoken, manly figure who has neither strict moral principles nor common sense. Although the wise and judicious Mr Stanley recognizes minor virtues among her many immoral flaws, he must conclude, “I never met with a man of sense, who, though he may join in flattering her, did not declare, as soon as she was out of the room, that he would not for the world, that she should be his wife or daughter” (*Coelebs* II:98-99). More dismisses the feminist as ludicrous and pitiful in her blind folly, a complete failure as a respectable woman.

For such reactionary representation of women, for her overt endorsement of female social and political subordination and dependence, More earned a favored place among her contemporaries, such as Richard Polwhele who presented the woman writer as the primary female genius in his famous work, *The Unsex'd Females: A Poem*, which denounced female revolutionaries like Wollstonecraft (Ty 3). Among many twentieth-century feminist critics, however, More has not met with such approval. While Alison Sulloway describes More as “hardly a friend to her own sex” (33), Lynne Agress actually defines the nineteenth-century writer as women’s “unconscious enemy” (52).

Faulting More along with Jane West for proposing the turn-of-the-century conservative ideal of the “docile, submissive woman content with her domestic sphere” (53), Eleanor Ty claims that *Coelebs* “took up and defended the Burkean model of the patriarchal household with an added emphasis on Christian doctrines,” thereby expressing and internalizing “male culture’s assumptions about female nature” by advocating compliance, restraint, and deference to masculine will, by reinforcing patriarchal authority and paternal control (17). In one of the only recent studies of More which explores *Coelebs* in some detail, Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace defines the works of More as well as Maria Edgeworth as “*case studies in complicity*” (12) which “make the process of celebrating our heritage as women more difficult” (5). Social historian Lawrence Stone even goes so far as to suggest that *Coelebs*’s success helped ensure that late eighteenth-century feminism “died a swift and natural death, not to be revived again until the twentieth century” (342).

Yet although More’s Evangelical bias dictates severe restrictions and repressions for women, her prescriptions for educational reforms suggest a strong current of disruption in her work. In fact, her critique of women’s pedagogy seems remarkably similar to Wollstonecraft’s in many respects. Even More’s contemporaries noticed the many points of correspondence; studying the polemical works of these two women authors, Mary Berry wrote that she found it “amazing” how much More and Wollstonecraft “agree on all the great points of female education. H. More will, I dare say, be very angry when she hears this” (Lewis II:91). Some recent critics, such as Kathryn Sutherland, Lucinda Cole, Gary Kelly (“Romantic and Revolutionary Feminism”), and Mitzi Myers (“Reform or Ruin”) follow Berry’s lead, Myers suggesting that while More’s model of Evangelical femininity and Wollstonecraft’s rational womanhood comprise alternative constructions of woman, these representations are “not mutually exclusive” (“Reform or Ruin” 211). Indeed, like Wollstonecraft, More seeks to make women better wives and mothers, to educate them to be useful and moral as a means of improving society, to be rational companions and responsible mothers rather than idle and

immoral coquettes. As an Evangelical More argues that life is a trial, that virtue and morality take work, so that a solid education is required to prepare the individual for the difficulties of life, whereas a superficial education merely gives women a false sense of ease (*Coelebs* II:237). To More as to Wollstonecraft, then, “human learning should be taught not as an end but as a means” (*Strictures* I:175). To serve this greater moral purpose, More attempts to reform women’s education in a manner similar to the other women writers in this study; she criticizes women’s fashionable education and offers an alternative construct which challenges dominant gender ideologies.

Specifically, More attacks the “phrenzy of accomplishments” defining women’s educational practices (*Strictures* I:62). Before leaving on his grand quest, Coelebs discusses the requirements a good wife must fulfil in order to ensure domestic bliss. His mother explains to him that

The education of the present race of females is not very favourable to domestic happiness. For my own part I call education, not that which smothers a woman with accomplishments, but that which tends to consolidate a firm and regular system of character; that which tends to form a friend, a companion, and a wife. I call education, not that which is made up of the shreds and patches of useless arts, but that which inculcates principles, polishes taste, regulates temper, cultivates reason, subdues the passions, directs the feelings, habituates to reflection, trains to self-denial, and more especially, that which refers all actions, feelings, sentiments, tastes, and passions, to the love and fear of God. (*Coelebs* I:14)

Coelebs’s mother distinguishes between a frivolous education, one that focuses on “useless arts” such as music and drawing, as opposed to a solid and religious schooling, one that privileges intellectual and moral development, and she attacks conventional practices as concentrating on the former. Indeed, her sentiments are later reinforced by Mr Stanley, who defines the present pedagogical system as “Mahometan” in that it “consists entirely in making women an object of attraction” (*Coelebs* I:195), a performer requiring exhibition; as Coelebs’s father tells his son before the older man’s death, “you will want a COMPANION: an ARTIST you may hire” (*Coelebs* I:19). Schooling in decorative accomplishments fails to prepare a woman for her proper roles as “directress” of her family, “preceptress” of her children, and “companion” for her husband (*Coelebs*

I:72). Accomplishments cannot create a “cultivated woman” (*Coelebs* I:350).

To illustrate the detrimental effects of such conventional pedagogy, More provides abundant examples of frivolous women rendered useless and immoral by their superficial schooling. As *Coelebs* searches for his future wife he meets a variety of women, young and old, and as Ty points out, often he does not even need to meet the daughters in the different families “as the defective conduct of the mother is usually sufficient to frighten off *Coelebs*” (17-18). There is the fashionable Mrs Ranby who recklessly neglects her girls’ religious instruction, erroneously leaving such tutelage solely to God (*Coelebs* I:52); the good Lady Belfield who, however well-intentioned, unwisely indulges her beloved children, correcting their errors but never their principles (*Coelebs* I:82); and the pious Lady Ashton whose narrow education reduces religion to a collection of threats to be feared and renders her daughters entirely hapless (*Coelebs* I:210-29). Then there are the two mercenary fortune hunters, the skillfully subtle Mrs Fentham (*Coelebs* I:97-99) and the brazen and bold Lady Bab Lawless (*Coelebs* I:111-13), as well as the soon-to-be reformed Lady Melbury whose placement of fashion before charity and responsibility impoverishes the worthy Stokes family (*Coelebs* I:160). Poor mothers all because poor teachers, these women are themselves products of a faulty schooling. Of the younger generation, *Coelebs* meets the Miss Flams whose expensive education leaves them hungering desperately after fashionable London society while unable to perform even the most basic domestic skills, such as cooking (*Coelebs* I:404-11; II:183). And of course there is Amelia Rattle whose particular education in the decorative accomplishments is discussed at length as explanation for her audacity and forwardness (*Coelebs* I:333-45).

As a corrective to such ill education, More attempts to rewrite the cultural text of feminine education by revaluing domesticity, by suggesting that in lieu of accomplishments, women need to be taught domestic economy, or skills necessary to run a household and family. In the opening of his discourse *Coelebs* privileges Milton’s representation of Eve before the fall as indicative of the



ideal woman, and in his discussion he asserts that Milton dissociates domesticity from “drudgery or servility” (*Coelebs* I:2).<sup>12</sup> This attempt to aggrandize the domestic constitutes a theme in the novel which culminates in a discussion led, as usual, by Mr Stanley, the voice of religious truth. The wise gentleman asserts that a woman needs practical knowledge of domestic affairs (*Coelebs* II:170), that “this domestic turn brings the understanding into action” because running a family requires common sense (II:172). He contends that “proportion and propriety” constitute domestic wisdom, that spending proportionately bespeaks integrity and judgement (II:174) because a “lady of mean understanding, or a vulgar education” will be unable to practice economy on a large scale (II:175). In support of Mr Stanley’s position, the reformed Mr Carlton explains that women may have a smaller sphere of activity than men, “but the perfection of a circle consists not in its dimension but in its correctness” (II:175), that a “sensible” woman can “imitate” divine order (II:176). Such discussion suggests that although More may keep women in the home, she takes great pains to imbue their roles within their limited sphere with competence, dignity, and importance. More rewrites the domestic as productive of intellectual and spiritual worth, and in so doing she rescripts the cultural text of female pedagogy.

To such domestic knowledge More adds masculine education, arguing for the necessity of women’s rational scholarship in content and form. Amelia Rattle’s modish schooling consists of French, Italian, German, drawing, dancing, singing, and harp and pianoforte lessons (*Coelebs* I:333-34). She explains that “what little time I can spare from these *principal* things, I give by odd minutes to ancient and modern history, and geography, and astronomy, and grammar, and botany. Then I attend lectures on chemistry, and experimental philosophy, for as I am not yet come out, I have not much to do in the evenings” (I:334-35). As the good Sir John Belfield surmises, the “confusion of acquirements” clearly constitutes “the *real business* of education,” with the serious, substantial subjects remaining merely “incidental” or “not learnt,” being discarded entirely upon the girl’s

entrance to society (I:341). In contrast, Mr Stanley schools his daughters in rational, masculine subjects, Lucilla studying Latin and Phoebe mathematics. Mr Stanley explains, on behalf of More, that a girl with “a strong inquisitive mind” needs “pursuits as call for vigorous application, and the exercise of the mental powers” (II:232), that such an education directed by her parents need not destroy the girl’s humility since “it is only superficial knowledge that excites vanity” (II:232). Indeed, Lady Belfield confirms that the soft and useful Lucilla remains free of “the terrors of learning” despite her knowledge of this masculine subject (II:232). Mr Stanley teaches Phoebe mathematics rather than simply arithmetic as a means of taming her naturally excessive vivacity, suggesting that had Phoebe “been fed on poetry and works of imagination” as is customary for young women, she “might have become a Miss Sparkes” (II:239), an ill fate indeed. To such defined subject matter More adds rational conversation, criticizing men in *Strictures* for practicing artificial rather than reasonable and religious discourse in the company of women, thus exacerbating women’s training to frivolity (II:42-29), and she applauds the Stanleys for including women in the “rational” and “pure” after-dinner conversations (*Coelebs* I:173). In short, a woman requires an education “solid enough to fix attention, exercise the intellect, and fortify the understanding” (*Coelebs* II:237); she needs exposure to serious subject matter.

The method of engagement with such rational discourse, furthermore, must be sustained and penetrating rather than superficial. Miss Rattle flies “so delightfully fast from one thing to another” (*Coelebs* I:335) that she learns nothing comprehensively. In contrast to men, whose specialization necessitates extensive knowledge in their chosen area, women “learn every thing” but “know nothing . . . well” (I:338), studying in “the shreds and scraps of time, stolen in the intervals of better things” rather than in the morning, “when the mind is most vigorous” (I:343). In *Strictures* More attacks “the swarms of *Abridgments*, *Beauties*, and *Compendiums*, which form too considerable a part of a young lady’s library” for contributing to such superficiality (I:160). She explains,

The *names* of the renowned characters in history thus become familiar in the mouths of those who can neither attach to the idea of the person, the series of his actions, nor the peculiarities of his character. A few fine passages from the poets (passages perhaps which derived their chief beauty from their position and connection) are huddled together by some extract-maker, whose brief and disconnected patches of broken and discordant materials, while they inflame young readers with the vanity of reciting, neither fill the mind nor form the taste. (I:160-61)

Reading extracts provides women with details devoid of context so that making connections and expanding their comprehension is impossible. Abridgments render women “shallower thinker[s]” by failing to excite “their critical spirit” (*Strictures* II:57). Women “are little accustomed to close reasoning on any subject; still less do they inure their minds to consider particular parts of a subject; they are not habituated to turn a truth round and view it in all its varied aspects and positions” (*Strictures* I:166-67). To rectify the situation More advises “serious study” (*Strictures* I:167), books that “exercise the reasoning faculties” (*Strictures* I:164) and vigorous thinking. Only reason, reflection, and religion will create “rational” and “accountable” beings (*Strictures* I:69).

Of course, in granting women access to classically masculine areas and methods of education, More is not an extremist. She has no intention of making women into scholars. When Phoebe’s exuberant sensibility is suitably curbed by her “dry studies,” Mr Stanley “discontinue[s]” her mathematical schooling (much as More’s own father, who instructed the intelligent More in Latin and mathematics, halted her mathematical studies when he became “frightened at his own success” [Roberts I:12]), because one does not want to create “a mathematical lady” (*Coelebs* II:240) any more than a scientific one (II:151). What knowledge they do acquire from intellectual stimulation, moreover, women must bear “meekly” (II:151). Lucilla appeals to *Coelebs* precisely because she has “the true learning of a lady,” which is “a knowlege [sic] that is rather detected than displayed,” an intellect that men can recognize in her conversation without requiring vulgar exhibition (II:290). And Lucilla, after all, is a rarity; Mr Stanley asserts firmly that because not all women are alike, they do not all need Latin, just some form of intellectual stimulation (II:233). More may argue for a more

masculine pedagogy for women, but her endorsement is distinctly qualified.

The avowed interests which such educational reforms serve, furthermore, are markedly male. As suggested earlier, More concentrates on how education can turn women into better companions for men; there is no suggestion of what women might want for themselves (Hall 88). Woman is seen in relation to man; as Kowaleski-Wallace points out, “Lucilla’s impact depends on Coelebs’ approving eye” (50). Indeed, More contends that a woman must reason and reflect not so that she can have or speak her own ideas, but so that she can understand her husband’s. Her function in conversation is to listen with “the silence of sparkling intelligence” (*Strictures* II:65), a role at which Lucilla so excels that her muteness, Claudia Johnson claims, “cannot be distinguished from insipidness or imbecility” (*Jane Austen* 18). At base, “the great and primary objects of instruction” are not, according to Mr Stanley, women’s intellectual growth as an end in itself, but rather “The inculcation of fortitude, prudence, humility, temperance, self-denial” (*Coelebs* II:248). More firmly reasserts the negative virtues promulgated in conduct literature as the proper goals of education (Richardson 175), virtues which require submission to the masculine will, as the example of the long-suffering Mrs Carlton painfully demonstrates. Improving women’s education, according to More’s argument, will greatly benefit the lives of men.

But the point remains that to whatever purposes she directs her reforms, More still proposes that intellectual acquirement is necessary for women, and consequently her discourse poses a concerted challenge to conventional gender ideology. Lucilla, as the only woman fitting Coelebs’s taxing ideal, is the perfect blend of femininity and masculinity; as the garden metaphors which surround her representation suggest, she is the properly cultivated woman. On the one hand, she lacks the vanity and idleness of the fashionable woman and excels in piety and feminine industry: she is, according to her mother, “half a nun” (*Coelebs* II:113) whose dominant virtues are “sincerity and humility” (II:47), a woman who practices her religion with concerted self-scrutiny and aptly

proves the maxim Coelebs learns from his mother that “*consistency is the true test of piety*” (II:384). Devoid of jealousy (II:132) and careful never to say too much (II:108), Lucilla is a mistress of domestic economy, compassionate yet “skilful” in keeping accounts (I:181), helping to raise her sisters (I:187), looking after the family cares since the age of sixteen (I:180), and extending her efforts to the surrounding community through charitable works, teaching poor children at her school (I:351), ministering to the sick and poor (II:20), and “embellish[ing] poverty” by providing greenery from her self-made “bower” (I:376) to start orchards and cottage-gardens in the neighboring village (II:53). At the same time, “the stamp of mind [is] intelligibly printed on [her] face” (I:185). Lucilla has just enough of that useful intellect usually ascribed to the other sex to ensure her own understanding while raising Coelebs’s comprehension through conversation (I:240), thus functioning as his “coadjutress,” “directress,” and “presiding genius” (II:25); in Myers’s words, she is “a wife to be consulted, not dictated to” (“Reform or Ruin” 210). Coelebs concludes, “She is . . . from nature—a woman, gentle, feeling, animated, modest.—She is, by education elegant, informed, enlightened.—She is, from religion, pious, humble, candid, charitable” (I:239). Thus reasonable, religious, and industrious, Lucilla ensures the domestic happiness, the “rational scene of felicity” (II:429), which Coelebs seeks in a marriage of mutuality where tastes conform and principles match (II:119).

Despite the basic assumption of women’s political and social subordination which underwrites More’s narrative, then, the implications of this revised gender construct for women’s lives cannot entirely be reduced to reactionary restriction. More may support the social dependence of women, but she seeks their moral autonomy. Mr Stanley explains,

Now the woman who derives her principles from the Bible, and her amusements from intellectual sources, from the beauties of nature, and from active employment and exercise, will not pant for *beholders*. . . . Her resources are within herself. She possesses the truest independence. She does not wait for the opinion of the world, to know if she is right; nor for the applause of the world, to know if she is happy. (II:425)

Although Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace contends that Mr Stanley's control of Lucilla's education keeps the girl subjected to paternal authority (52),<sup>13</sup> the familial patriarch himself argues for Lucilla's moral, if not worldly, independence.

In fact, the schooling Mr Stanley grants the heroine actually involves a certain social, and not purely spiritual, agency. Lynne Agress is incorrect to suggest that More, like many of her female contemporaries, "sought to condition women to idleness" (39), because the virtue More advocates is decidedly active.<sup>14</sup> Lucilla manages her familial household, her school, as well as her orchard, and such financial endeavors, Edward Copeland explains, offer "a glorious opportunity for women, an open door for them to step into the mainstream of economic life" (72); the feminine virtue of domestic economy invites women to participate in bourgeois commerce. Further, More elevates charity, as the duty of women of means, to the level of civic activism and professional activity. Mrs Stanley proclaims,

I have often heard it regretted that ladies have no stated employment, no profession. It is a mistake. *Charity is the calling of a lady; the care of the poor is her profession.* Men have little time or taste for details. Women of fortune have abundant leisure, which can in no way be so properly or so pleasantly filled up, as in making themselves intimately acquainted with the worth and the wants of all within their reach. (*Coelebs* II:21)

Through Mrs Stanley, More argues that women's difference, their eye for detail and their exclusion from the job market as well as their natural propensity for compassion and knowledge of domestic interests, particularly suits them to charitable work. At the same time, she elevates that philanthropic activity to the status of a "profession," a "disciplined vocation that necessitates thoughtful public action" (Cole 118). In her forceful analysis of More's significance, Mitzi Myers claims that the early nineteenth-century writer's works thus "comprise a practical, comprehensive program for converting the standard *topos* of feminine influence from pacifying sham to redemptive fact" ("Reform or Ruin" 208), preserving conventional appearances while reorganizing the dominant culture's beliefs and values to give women relevance and to expand their sphere ("Reform or Ruin" 208-09). Myers

explains that More ennobles women with a power not of dominance, but of ability and competence (“Reform or Ruin” 209),<sup>15</sup> and in offering philanthropy to her sex as “a lawful avenue to achievement,” More, not surprisingly, found a highly receptive female audience (“Reform or Ruin” 210). In a time when female activity was increasingly limited, Hannah More articulates acceptable methods of self-expression and meaningful enterprise in order to counteract “the littleness of the employments in which [women] are usually engaged” (*Strictures* II:44), thereby expanding, at least to some degree, women’s agency.

If More extends women’s social boundaries, she also attempts to increase their political significance. In the opening of *Strictures*, More directly confirms women’s potency by calling on the female sex to use their power “not for the gratification of vanity or the indulgence of pleasure” (I:3), but “to raise the depressed tone of public morals, to awaken the drowsy spirit of religious principle, and to re-animate the dormant power of active piety” (I:4). The power to which More refers is of moral influence over men and children rather than direct political action, but she nonetheless constructs women, in their Christian role as domestic custodians of morality and religious principles, as the potential saviors of their country in a time when national unity and imperial defence were paramount. Referring to *Strictures*, Gary Kelly explains that in advising women “to use their feminine power over men not for mere courtly ends but for the salvation of Britain,” More

transforms the domestic helpmeet into the principal agent, not just of social reform, but of national survival. . . . Implicitly the personal, familial and local sphere of women’s special ‘power’ becomes the major, the decisive sphere of action for national *and* international survival. Without appearing to do so, More has subverted the hierarchy of patriarchy by inverting it or by turning its inside (subjectivity, domesticity) out (the social, the public). (“Revolutionary and Romantic Feminism” 118)

Like Wollstonecraft, More confines women to the domestic, but she takes the private to the mainstream by endowing moral domesticity with civic and political responsibility.

In *Coelebs*, therefore, More reconstructs gender through educational reforms, and although her discourse reinscribes women's worldly subordination to men, it nevertheless seeks to expand female agency and consequence. Such a challenge to gender ideology, in turn, relies heavily on a radical rewriting of dominant cultural perceptions of intellect, theoretical speculations which More outlines in *Strictures*. While More contends that women need a more solid education to exercise and develop their intellectual capacities, she also proposes essential differences in the mental abilities of the sexes. Suggesting that "Each sex has its proper excellencies" (*Strictures* II:21), natural and original distinctions "stamped by the hand of the Creator" (II:21), More asserts that men have a "superior strength of body and a firmer texture of mind" (II:23) than women, and, as a result, women "do not so much generalize their ideas as men, nor do their minds seize a great subject with so large a grasp" (II:25). She explains,

women have equal *parts*, but are inferior in *wholeness* of mind in the integral understanding: that though a superior woman may possess single faculties in equal perfection, yet there is commonly a juster proportion in the mind of a superior man: that if women have in an equal degree the faculty of fancy which creates images, and the faculty of memory which collects and stores ideas, they seem not to possess in an equal measure the faculty of comparing, combining, analyzing, and separating these ideas; that deep and patient thinking which goes to the bottom of a subject; nor that power of arrangement which knows how to link a thousand consecutive ideas in one dependent train, without losing sight of the original idea out of which the rest grow, and on which they all hang. (II:26-27)

More suggests that women lack the ability to generalize from the particular, to assimilate ideas, to integrate knowledge. They equal men in fancy and memory, but they fall short in analytical, theoretical, penetrating comprehension, the "*wholeness* of mind" in which men are "superior." Of course, that More, as a female writer, makes such sweeping, generalizing assertions somewhat undermines the tenor of her argument here, and the proposition, voiced by Alice Browne, that reforms initiated by earlier feminists rendered it no longer vital by the time More was writing for women to assert that they were as rational as men (176) suggests that affirming rational equality did not necessarily factor into early nineteenth-century feminist analyses. Nevertheless, this apparent



assertion of women's natural intellectual inferiority seems to bespeak a reactionary collusion with patriarchal assumptions and justifications of male privilege.

However, More creates enough ambivalence in her discourse to allow for speculation about the implications of this apparent complicity. She continues:

as it is allowed the education of women is so defective, the alleged inferiority of their minds may be accounted for on that ground more justly than by ascribing it to their natural make. And, indeed, there is so much truth in the remark, that . . . till the female sex are more carefully instructed, this question will always remain as undecided as to the *degree* of difference between the understandings of men and women. (II:28)

In contrast with her earlier declaration, here More casts doubt on the naturalness of the differences in the minds of the sexes, suggesting that "defective" education may create intellectual inequality, that the distinction is one of "*degree*" rather than kind, and that even that degree cannot be known until women are given the opportunity to develop their minds fully, the implication being that women and men may not differ so much after all. Because More at times cites nature, at times education, as the source of women's intellectual difference, critics like Lynne Agress claim an "underlying and disturbing illogic" in More's work (51), or a confusion, as Alison Sulloway contends, "between genetics and fashion" (191). I suggest that rather than a limitation, such equivocation, as in Opie's novel, proves useful, the ensuing ambiguity creating a sense of possibility that invites the reader to question ready assumptions. Margaret Kirkham explains that the subject of female education was so sensitive after 1798 that many women took great pains to dissociate themselves from any radical implications, and she concludes that More (like Edgeworth) was "simply cautious to the point of half-denying the case [she] argued" (49). In the conservative British fervor at the turn of the century, More complies with custom by gesturing to male superiority only to qualify that gesture to the point of undercutting it. More may assert men's cognitive superiority, but in describing that capacity as unquantifiable, she undermines the distinction through indirection and uncertainty.

But More's perception of intellectual activity reaches beyond mere ambivalence; in exploring

the relation of the sexes and mental capacities, the polemicist constructs an alternative system of value which reinterprets the significance of intellectual acquirements. In diagnosing women's difference, More states,

The female too in her intellectual pursuits is turned aside by her characteristic tastes and feelings. Woman in the career of genius, is the Atalanta, who will risk losing the race by running out of her road to pick up the golden apple; while her male competitor, without, perhaps, possessing greater natural strength or swiftness, will more certainly attain his object, by being less exposed to the seductions of extraneous beauty, and will win the race by despising the bait. (*Strictures* II:27)

In her analysis of this passage, Mary Poovey argues that although More invokes the "masculine value system of competition" (*Proper Lady* 42) to suggest that men's "steadiness" and "direct pursuit" prove more effective than "tastes" and "feelings" in winning the race of "intellectual pursuits," the nineteenth-century writer "inadvertently acknowledges that there might be another system of values at work here too, that the woman, 'perhaps, possessing greater natural strength [and] swiftness,' might have won had she not found the 'extraneous beauty' more appealing than finishing first" (*Proper Lady* 42-43).<sup>16</sup> Indeed, More must be read according to her "alternative hierarch[y] of values" (Poovey, *Proper Lady* 43), a paradigm which grants primacy to co-operation over competition and intuition over abstract speculation, rather than according to customary patriarchal dicta which privilege the ability to generalize and analyze as indicative of serious intellectual activity. More says that women surpass men in "delicacy and quickness of perception" as well as "in details" (II:25); "they are acute observers, and accurate judges of life and manners" who "often feel what is just more instantaneously than they can define it. They have an intuitive penetration into characters, bestowed on them by Providence" (II:26). Such intuitive ability proves most worthy in More's argument because abstract reasoning is insufficient to bring an individual to Christian faith; she says, "we must feel it with our senses" (*Coelebs* I:224). More thus confirms sexual distinctions in intellectual abilities, but she simultaneously revalues those differences to grant women's innate mental capacities a favored role in bringing the individual closer to God.

In a sense, then, Gary Kelly is correct in his assertion that in some ways, “More’s feminism made larger claims for women than did Wollstonecraft’s” (“Revolutionary and Romantic Feminism” 117). Wollstonecraft clings to patriarchal definitions of intellectual acquirement, privileging masculine reason as the primary mental faculty to which women need access in order to seek perfection; Opie, on the other hand, criticizes the conventional emphasis on theory and abstract generalizations that defines masculine rationality; but More, influenced by Evangelical doctrine, reaches even further to challenge and rewrite the masculinist value system of intellectual processes in order to create an alternative construct which ennobles women and grants them a distinct advantage over men. Based on such revaluation, More easily asserts women’s inferiority at generalizing, analyzing, and criticizing because such activities are not of primary importance to the individual’s spiritual development, the sole purpose of the Christian’s existence.<sup>17</sup> By the same token, she also readily grants men power over the public sphere, “the deep and daring scenes of action and of council; in government, in arms, in science, in commerce, and in those professions which demand a higher reach, and a wider range of powers,” because such concerns are insignificant (*Strictures* II:24); the Christian’s eye is on the next world, not this one. To More, the quest for women’s material equality proves superfluous because they are already men’s equals in the only relevant measure of worth, morality (*Strictures* II:30), and they prove superior in the innate intellectual abilities which support such religious virtue. More’s alternative paradigm thus effectively overturns standard male-based hierarchies of value in order to aggrandize women and spirituality.

In articulating this epistemological revision, however, More seems to fall prey to circular logic. She says that women “have in the native constitution of their minds, as well as from the relative situations they are called to fill, a certain sense of attachment and dependence, which is peculiarly favorable to religion” (*Strictures* II:32), citing women’s leisure, protected lifestyle, and

natural qualities as “favorable to the devotional spirit” (II:31). To reinforce her proposition that “In their Christian course women have every superior advantage” (II:31), she goes on to assert that women’s limited education proves beneficial to their spiritual development. Suggesting that men’s classical schooling “confuses their ideas of piety” by emphasizing Pagan philosophy, manners, and licentious language (*Strictures* II:32-33), More contends that women, being less educated, “have less knowledge to unknow, and no schemes to unlearn; they have not to shake off the pride of system, and to disincumber [sic] their minds from the shackles of favourite theories” (II:33). In the midst of a strong, religious appeal for improvements in female education, therefore, More cites women’s limited schooling as an actual advantage in women’s moral development. However, this seeming contradiction is more apparent than real because More distinguishes between a “solid” education (*Coelebs* II:237), which she recommends for women, and a classical one, by which she means specifically the study of ancient texts. She thus argues for women’s access to substantial subjects and more rigorous scholarly processes rather than to specifically ancient, Pagan readings.

In many ways, then, More’s argument is potentially progressive if read in the context of her conservative historical moment rather than perceived anachronistically. As Gary Kelly explains, “More’s advocacy of the ‘duties’ rather than ‘rights’ of woman in *Strictures* and *Coelebs* may not seem like feminism as we now understand it. But it was the kind of feminism accepted in the bourgeois cultural revolution for most of the nineteenth century” (“Revolutionary and Romantic Feminism” 119). In attempting to revalue intellectual activity, creating her own, Evangelical-based paradigm of cognitive powers rather than passively accepting the value system prescribed by the masculinist status quo, More infuses her proposals for women’s educational reforms with disruptive power, and she does so in a manner palatable to the dominant social order. What is more, she even implicates the turn-of-the-century male in this reconstructive process.

Like Wollstonecraft, Fenwick, Hays, and Opie, More does not explore men’s education in

any detail. As suggested above, she does criticize the study of classical, because Pagan, texts, and she insists on a religious schooling for men; Mr Carlton's dissipated lifestyle prior to his conversion is presented as the direct result of his being educated "in an almost entire ignorance of religion" (*Coelebs* II:62). But other than promoting religious instruction, More does not attempt to reconstruct men's education in a manner similar to women's; she does not examine the methodology or content of male pedagogy in any depth or scope. However, she does create an alternative male gender construct as a result of her religious, rather than pedagogical, discussion. As an Evangelical, More privileges Christian values. She also believes in a loving, benevolent rather than a vengeful, punitive God; Mr Stanley, for example, exposes Lady Ashton's error in teaching her daughters to fear the Creator and earthly happiness (*Coelebs* I:215-17). More thereby conflates Christian and feminine virtues, suggesting that the "passive virtues," such as humility, self-denial, and modesty, are "peculiarly Christian and peculiarly feminine" (*Coelebs* II:186). As "peculiarly Christian," these feminine virtues, it follows, need be practiced by men as well as women. Myers explains, "men, forsaking aristocratic male honor, must also accede to the feminization of their ethos in the name of Jesus. . . . [More] adjures females to self-discipline, but the worldly latitude forbidden them is not allowed to men either and what is good for women is also salutary for men" ("Reform or Ruin" 208). Consequently, More may, as Alan Richardson suggests, recall "conduct book verities" (175), but she extends those negative virtues to include men; humility and disinterestedness are as significant for *Coelebs* as for *Lucilla*. As an Evangelical, More thus participates in the feminization of culture indicative of the early stages of the bourgeois cultural revolution, prior to the remasculinization of culture that defined Romantic-era Britain. In the process, she constructs what other female writers before her do not, a positively feminized male, a man rendered virtuous rather than effeminate by his feminized Christian principles.

The irony here is that despite such large-scale reworkings of dominant gender constructs for

both sexes, More's discourse perpetuates, even exaggerates, female subordination. The central factor which circumscribes the disruptive possibility implicit in More's argument, I suggest, is her persistent belief in the value of hierarchy. In her *Cheap Repository Tracts* More may rewrite class relations, bringing Evangelical, bourgeois values to the upper as well as lower orders, demanding middle- and upper-class responsibility for the moral and economic salvation of the poor, but her revisionist efforts maintain class hierarchy. As Lucinda Cole explains, "While believing that this disparity [between classes] would disappear in heaven, at least throughout her earthly life, More was devoted to keeping it intact" (121). In their roles as Britain's charity workers, women of the upper and middling ranks were thus complicit in preserving paternalistic class relations (Kowaleski-Wallace 72). As *Coelebs* and *Strictures* demonstrate, More's ideology renders women complicit in perpetuating customary disparities in sexual relations as well. As suggested earlier, in attempting to rework dominant values along Christian lines, More privileges co-operation over competition as the proper basis for relations between the sexes (*Strictures* II:13), suggesting that struggle precludes happiness (*Strictures* II:14). But in the process she fails to reconstruct the binary of sexual relations itself; she merely inverts the conventional dualism that opposes man and woman to assert women's moral superiority while justifying the traditional binary that demands women's social inferiority. She does not attempt to displace or rework the binary in terms of relational rather than hierarchical difference. Instead, More clings to the notion of hierarchy, a fundamental value of customary patriarchal ideology which necessitates division and subordination. *Coelebs* and the good Mr Stanley, therefore, may adopt constructive feminine values, but instead of this gender reconstruction translating into sexual equality, it merely justifies women's further repression because hierarchy and division remain at the base of More's ideology.

Indeed, history has demonstrated that the Evangelical construction of woman may have granted her moral dignity, but it also helped create the restrictive perceptions of womanhood which

came to dominate Victorian culture. As discussed in chapter two, Gary Kelly aptly demonstrates how the middle-class male appropriated the domestic ideal which privileged the feminine to serve male hegemony and bourgeois ascendancy ("Women Novelists" 373). Certainly More, as a highly influential Evangelical, participated in this process in spite of the potentially radical ideas she proposed in terms of education and gender construction. More's acceptance of sexual and class hierarchy allows the progressive possibility in her discourse to be turned to repression, so that in the idealized Lucilla can be glimpsed an early hint of the spiritual, submissive, self-sacrificing creature who would evolve into the Victorian angel in the house.

Nevertheless, I agree with Kathryn Sutherland that "Tory" feminists like More require investigation, that "Until we come to recognise this powerful and persistent strain of feminism, we shall continue to restrict our canon of women writers and to underestimate women's social effectiveness" (33). If More helped lay the groundwork for the restrictive ideology which would repress British women throughout the nineteenth century, she also helped sow the seeds of feminist resistance by promoting and helping to effect educational reforms. In many ways More deserves her reputation as a reactionary, but despite her political and religious dissociation from Opie, Hays, Fenwick, and Wollstonecraft, More proposes educational changes which recall the work of these more liberal writers. Like these other women, More effectively transforms dominant gender constructions by rewriting the educational text of her culture, arguing for a more useful feminine pedagogy that embraces the forms and methods of masculine schooling. History may recall Opie and More as conservative writers, but their novels help bring a tradition of feminist resistance into the nineteenth century.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Ina Ferris demonstrates that in her day Opie was praised by both Whig and Tory reviewers for her “feminine writing,” her intimate, simple, pure style which confirmed the author as an exemplar of femininity (56-57). Such reviews suggest that Opie was popular precisely for her non-threatening, seemingly anti-feminist discourse. More specifically, when *Adeline Mowbray* was re-issued in 1844, the Victorians read the novel “as a moral tale about women who thought they were clever enough to live outside society” (Winterson viii). In its initial publication and subsequent re-issue in the nineteenth century, the novel was embraced as a conservative depiction of female domesticity.

<sup>2</sup> Opie’s publishing history provides ample evidence of her prominence and popularity. In their investigation of Opie’s as well as Mary Robinson’s relationships with their publishers, Jan Fergus and Janice Farrar Thaddeus reveal that Opie enjoyed a thirty-year profitable association with Longman (190), a business arrangement which was curtailed only when Opie’s conversion to Quakerism prevented her from writing any more fiction (197). During these thirty years Opie was considered reasonably successful and moderately popular by Longman’s definition because the publisher would print 2000 copies of any new work by her (198); most novelists could expect a printing of only 1000. Only a very few writers, “perhaps only Walter Scott among Longman’s authors,” could expect a run of 3000 books (198).

<sup>3</sup> Both Spender and Eberle suggest that the historical reduction of the novel to a conservative reading derives in large part from Quaker and Victorian influences. Refusing to read the novel as a simple warning against radical promiscuity, Spender argues that such an interpretation represents an attempt by the Society of Friends and the Victorians to defend Opie’s morality by reconstructing the novel as a “respectable” text according to religious and mid-century standards (*Mothers* 322). Eberle faults Cecilia Lucy Brightwell, Opie’s first biographer and daughter of the executor of Opie’s estate, as the critic “perhaps most responsible for the author’s reputation of Victorian ‘respectability,’” since Brightwell heavily edited Opie’s letters in an effort to represent the author as a proper lady writer (148, n.16).

<sup>4</sup> Hays’s response to the gendered construction of passion and rationality as outlined in the last chapter also gestures to a concern with abstraction, although to a far lesser extent than Opie. At the beginning of *Emma Courtney*, Emma explains that she tells her tale to the young Augustus in order to teach him by example as “a more striking and affecting lesson than abstract philosophy can ever afford” (5). In one of her letters to Mr Francis, Emma also registers her frustration with the man of reason’s constant philosophizing, arguing that she loves as “an individual—(for love in the abstract, loving mankind collectively, conveys to me no idea)” (148). Emma speaks Hays’s interest in specific circumstances, a concern which Mr Francis’s theory does not address.

<sup>5</sup> Although the narrative obviously invokes Godwin, I do not wish to delve too deeply into the novel’s reaction to his particular discourses. Opie’s response to the specifics of Godwin’s theories is highly complex and would necessitate a much more detailed investigation than I am able to provide in the present study. I am concerned in a more general sense with radical, and not specifically Godwinian, ideology. However, I find it significant to note Eberle’s recognition that although Opie tends to ignore certain aspects of Godwin’s theory, specifically Godwin’s acknowledgement “that theory and practice do not proceed at the same pace,” Godwin also “continually asserts that opinion changes only when individuals adopt new practices” (149, n. 30).



Eberle's argument suggests that Godwin was somewhat ambiguous concerning the effect on the individual of the disparity between theory and practice.

<sup>6</sup> See Eberle for a discussion of Godwin's particular sexual bias (127, 130).

<sup>7</sup> Unlike the other novels in this study which merely gesture to issues of colonialism and slavery, *Adeline Mowbray* presents a significant black character in the figure of Savanna. For a comprehensive, post-colonial discussion of Savanna, see Eberle's essay. Eberle recognizes a parallel between Savanna and Adeline; both "challenge conventional prescriptions of how a proper British woman should look and behave; they are both persecuted by an ignorant populace which does not recognize their true virtue" (142). Because of these similarities, Eberle suggests that Opie uses Savanna to illustrate that "the escaped black slave can serve as an empowering model for the psychologically shackled white British woman" (142). Indeed, Savanna, especially in her dealings with the selfish Berrendale (who is continually linked with West Indies colonialism) is powerfully defiant (e.g. 184; 189), and Eberle suggests that because of this resistance, Savanna exists at the close of the novel as an emblem of Adeline's political radicalism (145). In this manner, Opie strategically displaces the disruptive influences at the close of her novel onto the colonial other in order to comply with conventions of closure without completely sacrificing her radical arguments. However, Eberle also points out that Opie's "romantic racism" qualifies any progressive reading of Savanna (141). The attempt to represent Savanna and tawny boy's West Indian dialect and the reduction of these characters to irrational devotees who cannot control their constant emotional outbursts threatens to limit mother and son to racist stereotypes. Although Opie goes further than either Fenwick or Hays in attempting to represent the cultural other and address racial prejudice, as in *Secresy* and *Emma Courtney* colonial representation poses an unresolved tension in the novel.

<sup>8</sup> In all citations from *Coelebs* and *Strictures* I have modernized the spelling to facilitate reading.

<sup>9</sup> For example, Mitzi Myers ("Tracts"), Susan Pederson, and Gary Kelly ("Popular Culture") provide illuminating discussions of the *Cheap Repository Tracts*. Lucinda Cole, Kathryn Sutherland, as well as Myers again ("Reform or Ruin") offer challenging investigations of *Strictures*. A notable exception is Elizabeth Kowaleski-Wallace who examines in some detail *Coelebs* as well as *Strictures* in *Their Father's Daughters*.

<sup>10</sup> In terms of the financial rewards enjoyed by More, Edward Copeland explains that the female author assumed all of the publishing expenses for *Coelebs*, which she claimed as 5000 pounds, and she still cleared 2000 pounds, keeping the copyright for herself. Copeland calls her success "a brilliant achievement" dependent upon having enough capital, "a condition rare indeed for a woman author" (247, n.7).

<sup>11</sup> In terms of the success of this project, Susan Pederson suggests that the tales were more effective in the "recruitment of the upper class to the role of moral arbiters of popular culture" than in the actual conversion of the poor (109). Similarly, Gary Kelly asserts that the pricing policy—the Evangelicals bribed or menaced chapmen and booksellers into dispensing the *Tracts*, which were distributed free to the laboring classes—and the call for superior editions by the middle and upper classes suggest that the *Tracts* "appealed more to the middle and upper ranks, because they represented their class-based view of the lower ranks" ("Popular Culture" 154), a view which held that the working classes were responsible for their own poverty.

<sup>12</sup> For a full discussion of More's use of Milton in *Coelebs*, see Kowaleski-Wallace. Referring specifically to this representation of domesticity, Eleanor Ty argues that More fails to mention the "paradoxical nature" of Milton's Eve, claiming that "More's suppression of the self-willed, disobedient, and unsettling side of Eve indicates the inadequacy and the one-sidedness of her ideal" (18). However, I suggest that by calling upon Milton's Eve, whose paradoxical nature is a cultural given, More implicitly invokes the notion of intellectual curiosity and independence, which she will discuss in other forms throughout her text, without having to account for Eve's guilt or sin. Ty is willing to acknowledge the use of strategic complicity by radical writers like Hays or Inchbald, but she does not allow for the same kind of indirection by a conservative writer like More, who had to negotiate her way into discourse without compromising her reputation as a political reactionary.

<sup>13</sup> Although Mr Stanley's pedagogical philosophy, teaching each girl according to her individual talent (*Coelebs* II:249-50), may seem highly progressive in its embrace of individualism, Kowaleski-Wallace argues that it also indicates More's clear subscription to the Burkean ideal of the benevolent patriarch. Kowaleski-Wallace proposes that Mr Stanley's disciplined yet loving direction of Lucilla's education equips her with an active conscience to check any tendency to immodesty and immorality, but it also keeps her subjected to "an ongoing infantilism that inhibits her ability to act on her own authority," citing Lucilla's persistent self-doubt as evidence of her insecurity (52). Certainly Lucilla feels like an "imposter" (*Coelebs* II:104), unable to live up to her idealized reputation, but such humility and self-scrutiny More recommends as necessary to all Christians, male as well as female. In this sense, both sexes, not just women as Kowaleski-Wallace's analysis seems to suggest, are infantilized by Evangelical doctrine.

<sup>14</sup> The virtuous activity More recommends, however, in no way compares to the professional activity she allowed herself. Critics such as Agress (49) and Hall (87) note the irony implicit in the promotion of domesticity that dominates More's work, since More herself, although once engaged, neither married nor had children, but instead enjoyed a very public career as a published writer.

<sup>15</sup> Referring to the *Cheap Repository Tracts*, Myers also suggests that More represents women's power as a product of their usefulness, not love ("Tracts" 277). In thus displacing romantic affection with industry, More attempts to rewrite eighteenth-century notions of sensibility; in the preface to *Coelebs* the narrator suggests that he intends to represent love not as "an ungovernable impulse" but as existing "under the dominion of reason and religion" (I:ix). For a fuller discussion of the Evangelical reconstruction of sensibility, see Barker-Benfield's *The Culture of Sensibility* (394-95).

<sup>16</sup> Poovey also interprets this passage as evidence that More "identified the habit of intellectual indirection as characteristically feminine" (*Proper Lady* 42). It should not seem surprising, then, that More is capable of strategic complicity in her own discourse.

<sup>17</sup> In a similar manner, More suggests in her 1777 *Essays on Various Subjects* that women are less capable than men of excelling at science (Leranbaum 295). But again, More can acknowledge this inferiority because she finds science morally suspect (*Strictures* II:36), hence of less significance than more Christian subjects.

## Chapter Six: Sydney Owenson, Mary Brunton, and Feminism in the Isles

Wherever woman has been, there  
has she left the track of her  
humanity, to mark her passage.

Lady Morgan, *Woman and Her  
Master* (1840)

One year after the publication of *Coelebs*, Sydney Owenson's *Woman; or, Ida of Athens* (1809) appeared on the literary scene. To turn from the conservative Hannah More to Owenson (Lady Morgan)<sup>1</sup> seems a highly dramatic political shift since Owenson made a career of her radicalism, becoming widely known as an ardent Irish nationalist who spent her life fighting openly and publicly against political injustice and religious intolerance. To situate Owenson in a chapter with Scotland's Mary Brunton, whose *Discipline* was introduced in 1814, may also appear somewhat incongruous. Whereas Fenwick and Hays clearly espouse a radical bias and Opie and More have been identified by history as sharing an apparent orthodoxy, Owenson and Brunton appear a study in contrasts; Brunton's cautious, religious didacticism sharply diverges from Owenson's overt defiance and political subversion. Yet these two women writers share an interest in nationhood and community, and their works grant a larger perspective to my analysis of pedagogy and feminism in the early nineteenth century by reaching outward from London and the English countryside to explore the roles of women and education in Ireland and Scotland. Their novels suggest that feminist agitation for educational and gender reforms at the turn of the century stretched throughout the British Isles in markedly similar ways.

Of the two, Owenson has received certain critical attention of late as the creator, with Maria Edgeworth, of the national tale. Earning a reputation as a wit, a conversationalist, and a flamboyant social figure (Spender, *Mothers* 303), Owenson wrote prolifically, the influence and popularity she enjoyed in her own lifetime leading her biographer to suggest that she was perhaps “our first successful professional woman author” (Stevenson v). The daughter of an Irish actor and an English, Methodist mother, Owenson turned to writing early as a means of supporting her family and herself, and her efforts brought immediate success and fame, attracting the attention of the Marquis and Marchioness of Abercorn who would introduce the writer to her future husband<sup>2</sup> as well as the highest circles of Irish and British society (Spender, *Mothers* 304-05). Although Owenson’s first two novels were popular, it was her third, *The Wild Irish Girl: A National Tale* (1806), the first of the four patriotic fictions for which she is now remembered, which launched her lasting celebrity (Newcomer 28). According to Ann Jones, this novel made Owenson “almost overnight a name to be reckoned with among the popular novelists of the period” (190). In this text Owenson establishes herself as the champion of the Irish nation, denouncing English tyranny and promoting Catholic as well as Irish liberation. For such nationalistic sentiments the author was viciously attacked by Tory reviewers (Spender, *Mothers* 303), but if her novel courted political controversy, it also earned immense popularity, running through seven editions in two years (Spender, *Mothers* 304). In fact, *The Wild Irish Girl* was such a social and literary success that a whole set of commercial products were named after the heroine, Glorvina (Ferris 46), and Owenson herself became inextricably identified with her literary creation, the author being known thereafter as “Glorvina” or “the wild Irish girl” (Kelly, *English Fiction* 93). Owenson’s success was so great that she was later to become the first woman to be awarded a literary pension from the British government (Campbell, *Lady Morgan* 216).<sup>3</sup>

Because of the extraordinary achievement of *The Wild Irish Girl*, the few contemporary

critics who approach Owenson tend to do so on the basis of her generic innovations and political analysis. Gary Kelly identifies Owenson as the writer who developed the national tale (*Women, Writing, and Revolution* 178) as well as the novel of description and the footnote novel (*English Fiction* 92); Ann Jones asserts Owenson's contribution to the regional novel and novel of society (221); and Dale Spender identifies Owenson as "a pioneer of political fiction and the innovator of 'political romance'" (*Mothers* 313). More specifically, Ina Ferris argues that although critical reviews historically situated Owenson's novels, with their romantic excesses and sentimental emotionalism, within the paradigm of female reading (46), these works helped prepare the way for Sir Walter Scott. Ferris asserts, "Where Edgeworth functioned as (acknowledged) exemplary cultural realist for Scott, Morgan stands as the (unacknowledged) muse of the cultural romance which he also practiced" (123). Through her exploration of Irish politics, moreover, Owenson translated such literary innovation into cultural influence. Mary Campbell explains that Owenson made it "her mission to make the English reading public aware of Irish history, and sympathetic to the social, economic and political problems that had come out of that history" at a time when the English understood very little about the state of Ireland (Introduction viii). In her national tales Owenson sought to restore Ireland and its people to dignity, to secure equality for the Catholic majority, and to cajole absentee English landlords into assuming social responsibility for their tenants. Such discourse not only proved "crucial," according to Ferris, "to the formation of the rhetoric of nineteenth-century Irish nationalism" (122), but also enabled Owenson to gain influence over English public opinion, an authority that evolved into political force (Campbell, Introduction vii). Indeed, James Newcomer suggests that "From the appearance of *The Wild Irish Girl* onward whatever happened in Ireland—and to Ireland—was conditioned more or less by Lady Morgan" (18), that Owenson "in very great measure helped earn" the restoration of the Catholics to political and social participation with the signing of the Act of Catholic Emancipation by the King of England in

1829 (86). Clearly, Owenson's fiction, while largely neglected in canonical studies, proves of lasting literary and cultural significance.

Yet the current critical practice which seeks to reclaim Owenson as author all but ignores *Woman: or, Ida of Athens*, the novel which Owenson wrote immediately after *The Wild Irish Girl*. Although *Ida* is not one of the four national tales for which Owenson earned her reputation, this novel has much in common with these other patriotic narratives; Gary Kelly even refers to *Ida* as "another 'national tale'" (*English Fiction* 311), since Owenson transports her concern with civil and religious liberty from Ireland to Athens. Against the backdrop of the Turkish occupation of Greece, *Ida* tells the story of two young, patriotic lovers, Ida Rosemeli, the ideal woman who hails from one of the oldest families in Athens, and Osmyn, a rebellious man of noble birth sold as a slave to the Disdar-Aga, a Turkish military leader in Athens. Transposing the patriotic struggle to free Greece from religious and political tyranny atop the lovers' quest for a romantic union, the novel poses clear analogical links to Ireland's situation by contrasting modern oppression with ancient freedom and greatness, by representing the evil effects of the subjection of one nation and culture to another. In choosing to represent her nationalistic concerns in a Greek setting, Owenson, Mary Campbell explains, exploited a popular trend by appealing "to the sentimental nationalism then in the air, for Greece and liberty were top of the list with young romantics," such as Byron, who was soon to leave for Athens and whose note in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* confirms his familiarity with Owenson's novel (*Lady Morgan* 97). Thus, *Ida* is not a complete departure from the national tales for which Owenson became famous, yet this novel tends to rate only a passing mention, if that, in recent Owenson scholarship. I suggest, however, that *Ida* warrants study not only for its literary and historical significance, but also for thematic reasons.

First of all, reviews of this particular novel set the terms of criticism that would dominate Owenson's literary career. Even those critics who applauded Owenson's novels often attacked her

writing style, and the response to *Ida* was no exception; one critic, for example, praised her “brilliant imagination” and “subtlety of intellect” but chastised “the pompous inflation” of her writing (qtd. in A. Jones 197). Lionel Stevenson suggests that Owenson’s efforts to conceal any deficiencies of her education—her assertions in the footnotes to her address that she wrote the novel in three months in the midst of society (I v) and that she “never corrected a proof sheet” (I vi)—gave reviewers “an easy opening” for such criticism (115-16). And such harsh stylistic analyses continue today. Ann Jones claims that Owenson was lost in the style of sensibility that “was rapidly becoming unfashionable” (197), and James Newcomer asserts that *Ida* deserves its literary obscurity because of its abstract characters, static scenes, and inflated diction (28-29). Certainly, *Ida* is weighed down by sentimental tropes, wild coincidences (the heroine just happens to run into Lord B in London at the height of her desperation [IV 106]), outlandish disguises, and Lord B’s incredible reformation. Even Owenson supposedly referred to *Ida* as “a bad book” of which she was ashamed (Dixon 352).

But all of these stylistic and structural criticisms aside, the one notorious response to *Ida* which, according to Ferris, would prove “decisive in setting her reputation and in making her an object of critical attention in the most powerful sites of critical discourse” came from John Wilson Croker, a writer for the *Quarterly Review* (48). In his review Croker attacks *Ida* not just for its excessive style, but also for its sexual and religious politics. He defines Owenson’s sentiments as “mischievous in tendency, and profligate in principle, licentious and irreverent in the highest degree,” attacking the author for dignifying Nature over God, such irreligiosity “to be honoured by libertinism in the women, disloyalty in the men, and atheism in both” (qtd. in Stevenson 118). He ends his diatribe by counselling Owenson to focus on being “a useful friend, a faithful wife, a tender mother, and a respectable and happy mistress of a family” rather than a writer (qtd. in Stevenson 118). This scandalous review gained Owenson notoriety as well as sympathy, and it helped set the pattern for subsequent critical responses to her discourse.<sup>4</sup>

I find the unmistakable sexual bias in Croker's review of *Ida* to be most telling. The references to the text as being "profligate" and "licentious" in encouraging "libertinism in the women," the recommendation to become a "happy mistress of a family," such reactionary and chauvinist revelations clearly point to the disturbing feminist tenor of Owenson's narrative. In her three previous novels Owenson creates strong, intelligent central female figures, but such representations, Stevenson argues, may be "merely the result of personal predilection"; only in *Ida*, Owenson's first woman-centred novel, does the author's latent feminism become deliberately manifest (111). Stevenson suggests that this development occurs largely through the influence of Madame de Staël whose *Corinne; ou, L'Italie* appeared in 1807. The biographer contends that "*Corinne* made Miss Owenson aware of a new cause to be championed—the defence of her own sex in a man-dominated world," that the "Irish de Staël," as her friends were already calling Owenson, was awakened to a new crusade to add to her quest for civil and religious freedom (111). Indeed, in the opening of her Preface Owenson defines her mandate as "delineat[ing] the character of woman in the perfection of its natural state" (I ix), and the titular abstraction *Woman* invokes an earlier influential attempt to assert female dignity, Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Such discourse was later to culminate in Owenson's 1840 *Woman and Her Master*, a two volume protest declaring women's historical significance and natural equality in spite of systemic subordination. But *Ida* represents her first overtly feminist text, and in this narrative Owenson grounds her defence of women in an exploration of education.

Specifically, in her efforts to assert women's inherent equality Owenson, as other writers before her, rejects women's customary, fashionable education as insufficient to support patriotic dignity. In contrast, she proposes, to borrow a term she uses incessantly throughout her narrative, a *blended* education for women, schooling that is at once masculine and feminine. Through *Ida*'s idealized pedagogical experience, Owenson feminizes Rousseauvian philosophy in order to grant



women greater knowledge and agency. In a decidedly Wollstonecraftian move, Owenson inverts Rousseau's educational theory by giving Emile's education to her Sophie, by granting Ida a masculine, rational education in form and content. At the same time, Owenson employs the Romantic revaluation of nature to rehabilitate sensibility and render it an honorable, fundamental component of female schooling. The result is Owenson's theory of female genius wherein intellect is married to intuition, wherein abstraction is wed to specificity, wherein Wollstonecraft is reconciled with More and Opie. Although Owenson's vision of the early nineteenth-century male represents a limitation in the failure to extend such gender reconstruction to men, the representation of female genius allows Owenson to appropriate male ambition and align it with female propriety in order to grant women, at least those who have the appropriately blended education, a vital public role as patriotic citizens in the quest for a liberated state. More overtly than any other writer in this study, Owenson blurs the boundaries of gender construction and pedagogical practice in order to reconcile masculinity and femininity through education, thereby creating an alternative, a stronger, a freer gender construct for early nineteenth-century female experience.

The ideological basis of such reformist activity derives from Owenson's liberal political bias, from her politics of reconciliation and tolerance. Referring to Owenson's Irish tales, Mary Campbell suggests that what the novelist longed for was a "Republic of Reconciliation" (Introduction x). In castigating the malevolence of agents and the negligence of English landlords, in denouncing religious intolerance, in asserting Irish dignity, Owenson voices vehement appeals for social and moral reform which consistently stop "short of revolution" (Kelly, *English Fiction* 93). In fact, Ann Jones explains that "despite the constant use by her political opponents of the term 'jacobin' to describe her she had no desire to cause any rift between English and Irish" (203); Owenson firmly accepted Ireland's dependence on England (Ferris 107). Rather than divisive rebellion, then, Owenson's novels privilege harmonious reunion. Her national tales attempt to resolve political

conflict through familial alliances by reconciling Anglo-Irish legal right to old Irish traditional right in the marriage of the hero and heroine (Tracy 9). Because *The Wild Irish Girl* sets the pattern for such nationalistic narrative, Robert Tracy terms this attempt at resolution “the Glorvina solution” (9). (Only Owenson’s final novel, *The O’Briens and the O’Flahertys*, defies such a reductive attempt at closure [A. Jones 223]). Although the Glorvina solution, as Scott was soon to find out, generates its own difficulties, this attempt at conflict resolution suggests that Owenson’s fiction privileges sympathetic understanding on a cultural scale wherein opposing factions are blended in a sense of national unity.

*Ida* is not a direct tale of Irish nationalism, yet this same spirit of reconciliation defines its politics. *Ida* learns from her wise uncle who serves as her teacher or “diako” that a virtuous government “takes the laws of nature for its basis” (II 147). Because “man, every where differing from man in exterior aspects, is every where from nature intrinsically the same” (IV 64), the subjugation of one man or nation to another, as Turkey oppresses Greece, proves unnatural, tyrannous, and ultimately self-destructive; in a rather imperialistic gesture, Owenson demonizes the Turkish people to serve her nationalistic agenda. As Owenson argues in her Preface, any state such as the Turkish regime, which abuses its authority by denying freedom and equality to any individual, “inevitably awakens public and general resistance, and finally subverts the very power it was meant to aggrandize” (I xxvi). Ironically, that *Ida* keeps black slaves does not seem to complicate or compromise this persistent glorification of freedom; as in several of the other novels in my study, the issues of slavery and imperialism remain unaddressed, or certainly ill-addressed, and thereby threaten to disrupt the political liberalism of the narrative. Nevertheless, Owenson firmly argues that a government which grants its citizens their rightful liberties will perpetuate itself because the individual will patriotically devote himself or herself to communal interests. In a wonderfully ironic episode in the first volume of her narrative (I 119-125), Owenson has the heroine respond to the

English traveller's manipulative musings on his life of pleasure, and in her discourse Ida gives a Godwinian twist to the Englishman's Epicurean philosophy. Ida explains that while the pursuit of pleasure is "the doctrine" of nature, "so finely has she [nature] regulated her laws, inseparably blending the selfish gratification with the social good, that the intemperate pursuit of any enjoyment, while it injures the community to which we belong, inevitably re-acts upon ourselves" (I 121). Ida, whose Greek character naturally tends to luxury and pleasure (I 22-23), argues that true joy is possible only when the individual's interests are "blended" or reconciled with the social good, that "There can be no individual happiness but that which harmonizes with the happiness of society" (II 4). This philosophy of social cohesion reconciles the part to the whole, the individual to the community, without subordinating or subsuming any one constituent element. I suggest that the radical innovations Owenson proposes for women's gender constructions and pedagogical practices grows from this politics of reconciliation.

Owenson's choice of an exotic setting for her narrative immediately contributes to this political project by creating a climate of instability and possibility. *Ida* begins *in medias res* with the Englishman, a secondary character who will later prove to be, in his new role as Lord B, the *deus ex machina* for the love story, wandering through Greece as an awe-struck outsider. Owenson thus invites the reader to view the temples, the ancient ruins, the natural beauty of this unknown place through the eyes of a foreigner, so that the feeling of dislocation creates a sense of unknowability and disruption from the opening moments of the novel. This sense of disturbance is further heightened by the Turkish feast which initiates the narrative. *Ida* is replete with festivals and feasts, masquerades and carnivals which reach all the way to London in the final volume. Such celebrations with their Bacchantes (I 5) and people in costume (Osmyn tends to wear disguises for political purposes as well) recall Bakhtin's discussion of the carnivalesque, his suggestion that masked revelry allows the transgression of boundaries, including those defining customary sexual and gender

distinctions. What is more, the novel abounds with women wearing veils, including the eponymous heroine. Literally, these veils serve a religious function, maintaining the modesty of both Muslim and Christian women by protecting them from the male gaze. Ida even finds a reason to sport her veil and thereby protect her modesty when she goes to England; after her father dies she dons a mourning habit (IV 122). But the notion of the veil, as recent psychoanalytical criticism suggests, is highly complicated. In her assessment of the veiled woman in cinema, Mary Ann Doane explains that the veil, because it at once attracts attention yet blocks the gaze, because it conceals as it reveals (110), symbolizes woman's "deception, instability, and unpredictability" by confounding the relation between the visible and the knowable (107); the veil is a "mark of precariousness" (107). To explore fully the significance of veils in this novel—for example, when Ida's veil is raised and lowered, when that movement is purposive or accidental, who initiates the movement and to what ends—would necessitate a lengthier discussion than I am able to offer here. For the moment I simply wish to suggest that the use of veils in the novel combines with the festivals and exoticism to create a sense of instability and indeterminacy, a climate of ambiguity and possibility which allows boundaries to be transgressed and alternatives to be conceived and articulated.

One such key instance in which barriers are permeated concerns women's education. From the moment Ida is introduced in the text, she is represented as a superior, remarkable woman. The Englishman, who first glimpses Ida asleep in the public bath, is struck by her beauty, but Stamati, the passionate Greek patriot whom the Englishman met earlier in Italy and whom the heroine freed from exile, informs the traveller that Ida is famous more for her "extraordinary learning" (I 39). In fact, Ida "only of all her countrywomen, had learnt to think for herself" (II 41). The daughter of a Greek archon and a mother of English heritage, Ida receives her schooling at the hands of her maternal uncle, and the education this rare, wise diako gives her is clearly influenced by Rousseauian philosophy. If in her response to Rousseau in her *Vindication* Wollstonecraft demands

a rational education for women, Owenson realizes that call in dramatic form by giving Emile's education to Ida.

As suggested in previous chapters, Rousseau details his educational philosophy in *Emile*, and in this text the philosopher perceives nature and culture to be in inevitable conflict, suggesting that the "many contradictions between the rights of nature and the laws of society" render socialization difficult (281). However, education provides the means through which these contradictions can be reconciled. Because "the first impulses of nature are always right" (*Emile* 56), Rousseau proposes that Emile be educated in isolation, away from society, that he wander freely in nature in order to allow his "feeling and passion to develop naturally, hence harmlessly," and to allow his reason to develop "to a stage that will enable him to control" those passions when in society (Gatens 14).<sup>5</sup> Cultivation of this rational faculty requires experience rather than book-learning, as Rousseau contends that a book "does not teach us to reason, it teaches us to use the reason of others rather than our own; it teaches us to believe much and know little" (*Emile* 20). Rousseau reacts against what Alan Richardson refers to as the "catechistic style of instruction" that had come to replace the dialectic system of learning in the late eighteenth century, the newer mechanical mode of intellectual engagement which emphasized repetition, drilling, and memorization (64). Instead of such artificial means of acquiring knowledge, Rousseau privileges intellectual experimentation and independent judgement. Emile, therefore, is allowed to roam in rural society, exploring his natural curiosity, but his tutor carefully controls his environment to ensure that the young student becomes a moral, judicious, autonomous member of civil society, that he learns the rights and obligations involved in the social contract. Of course, Emile's intended mate, Sophie, does not benefit from the same instruction. Believing sexual hierarchy to be necessary for social stability, Rousseau proposes, as Moira Gatens explains, that Sophie's "reason is to be left uncultivated not because she is incapable of it but because it may destroy those natural feminine qualities that

Rousseau sees as so essential to the survival of civil society” (18); Sophie is to remain in her “natural” state within the domestic sphere, connected to the public only through her husband, as a means of ensuring the continuity of social organization.

What is most striking about Owenson’s educational musings in *Ida* is that the Irish novelist appropriates this Rousseauvian pedagogical philosophy in order to feminize it; she divests Rousseau’s theory of its sexual bias and rescripts it for women. As the ideal educator the diako echoes Rousseau’s conviction that children are naturally innocent (II 20), but the diako complains that the education to which women are typically subjected takes great pains “to efface the traces of nature from [their] mind[s], and substitute art and prejudice and error in their place!” (II 23). Believing that the proper basis of education is “an observance of the laws, operations, and forms of nature” (II 35-36), the diako takes the young *Ida* while she is still in “thy purest state” (II 23) and “retire[s] from the world” (II 27) in order to teach and “guide” rather than “restrain” her development (II 24). In their solitude the diako refuses to reduce *Ida*’s learning to a method or system, explaining that

nature brought with each day, her own progressive, perfect plan of education; he [the diako] watched the senses, gradually correcting by hourly experience, the natural errors of a first timid experiment, and communicating to the intellectual power, those images from whence ideas spring, which, under the influence of moral sympathy, from their associations, and again expand themselves to new combinations; and he thought with a sigh of the folly of man, that forces on the memory of childhood a premature information which the senses have not yet experienced, and the mind is incapable of comprehending. (II 30)

In Rousseauvian fashion the diako allows *Ida* to experiment in a free but structured environment, to develop her intellectual capacity naturally according to her own interests and her own schedule, while he guides her progress and corrects her errors without imposing unnecessary restrictions or punishments. Believing “that from a too great cultivation of memory resulted a native barrenness of intellect” (II 36), the diako encourages independent thought and comprehensive understanding in *Ida*, allowing her only “few and select” books to read (II 36), preferring that she learn firsthand by

seeing and inferring.

In short, Ida receives a masculine, rational education from her diako in form and content, and despite Rousseau's paternalistic fears the development of this woman's masculine reason does not instigate social collapse. Learning by sympathy rather than method, following her mind's impulses rather than rule (IV 168), Ida cultivates "that deep intelligence which was alone drawn from nature, by habits of intense reflection which mastered every spring of human action, and often traced the most remote effect to its remotest cause" (I 139); her method of intellectual engagement is critical, penetrating, and expansive, never superficial or narrow. Like any well-educated woman, furthermore, she speaks several languages, draws, embroiders, dances, and sings (II 39), but she is also able to converse on politics, metaphysical theory, and classical authors (I 140). The diako's instruction thereby nurtures Ida's natural intellectual capacities, and, as I will explain in greater detail shortly, far from disrupting civic stability this rational education actually strengthens social cohesion by constructing woman as patriot whose reach extends effectively into the public sphere.

While thus dignifying intellectual achievement and rendering reason necessary to female progress, Owenson also appeals to Romantic representation in order to revalorize sensibility as a human virtue and therefore a vital and worthy part of a woman's education. As already suggested, while Rousseau values natural development he bases his pedagogical theory on "the inevitable contradictions between [the] natural and social human being" which require reconciliation through education (Gatens 24), on his vision of nature and culture as conflictual forces, and he uses this opposition which links the female sex with nature rather than culture to legitimate women's social subordination. Although clearly influenced by Rousseauvian philosophy, Owenson challenges this opposition by defining nature and culture as ideally harmonious since nature constitutes the proper basis of culture (I xxvii; II 14); she acknowledges conflict only when culture defies natural law and creates prejudice and tyranny, as when the Turks attempt to subjugate Greek citizens. Owenson's

argument here recalls Romantic revisionary efforts to aggrandize nature and, through it, sensibility as natural feeling. As discussed in previous chapters, Gary Kelly demonstrates that male Romantic writers appropriated eighteenth-century constructions of feminine sensibility in the process of remasculinizing culture and literature (“Women Novelists” 373). In *Ida* Owenson shares this Romantic sense of the value of natural sensibility, but she turns this revalorization of feeling to feminist purposes by coding sensibility as a human virtue that lends itself to worldly patriotism; in a declaration of his love Osmyrn repeats Ida’s belief that “sensibility . . . is the source of all human excellence, and of whose affections virtue itself is but composed” (III 27). Owenson persistently constructs sensibility as a necessary component of patriotism and consequently a crucial part of education. Where Wollstonecraft has difficulty accommodating and More tries to deny female sexuality (see Kowaleski-Wallace on More, *Their Father’s Daughters* 44-54), Owenson contends that women must not hide from their natural passions (I 189), that they should rather cultivate them; she asserts that “It is only under the influence of a corrupt education that the passions take an early flight” (II 74). To Owenson sensibility, like intellect, is natural, hence worthy of cultivation, and far from justifying women’s social repression, the connection of feeling and the female sex elevates women as patriotic citizens.

From her diako, therefore, Ida receives a perfect, because blended, education. At the instruction of her uncle Ida develops her mind as well as her sensibility so that, as the Englishman acknowledges in astonishment, “in [Ida] alone the elements of intellect and sense are so deliciously blended” (II 8). Wise yet sensitive, analytical yet compassionate, Ida is “a Sapho [sic] whom passion had not bewildered” (II 42-43). Thus educated Owenson’s heroine becomes the ideal representative of her sex, the embodiment of female potential who embraces masculine as well as feminine virtues. As the narrator explains, “the mind of Ida might be said to be purely philosophic, while her person, her manners, and disposition, were those of gay, of feminine, and innocent youth” (IV 153-54). In



fact, Ida “alone had the benefit of an education, that rendered her distinguished and unrivaled; she alone, by a singular coincidence of circumstances, and a perfect development of feeling and intelligence, had been awakened to a lively sense of the former splendor of her country, and its existing degradation” (II 41-42). Clearly, Ida’s mental abilities and sensitive capacity render her the perfect patriot. Owenson’s heroine, therefore, represents an alternative gender construct, one that reconciles masculinity and femininity, a woman “in whom the talents and the affections of the painter and the poet, the mistress and the child, the citizen and the philanthropist, were sweetly and intimately blended, each giving force and energy to the other” (IV 44). By reinterpreting Rousseau’s philosophy of rational education through the emerging Romantic construction of feeling and nature and turning both ideologies to feminist purposes, Owenson attempts to reform early nineteenth-century educational practices and reconstruct customary gender representations in order to grant women greater opportunity for development and agency.

To confirm Ida’s superiority, an excellence which derives primarily from the heroine’s unique education, Owenson introduces Jumeli, the Disdar-Aga’s Turkish daughter, as an example of the ill effects attendant upon conventionally inadequate schooling. For the most part, Jumeli is a static, functional character. Through her friendship with Ida, for example, Jumeli serves as the means through which the Disdar-Aga manipulates the heroine into visiting his harem, and the rumors of Jumeli’s elopement with Osmyn after the failed rebellion create a suitable obstacle for dividing the lovers and adding tension to the sentimental narrative. But beyond furthering the plot, Jumeli underscores the necessity of a substantive education for women. Owenson clearly links the two young women in order to contrast them, suggesting that although Ida and Jumeli share “certain sympathies in [their] dispositions and manners,” being “young, tender, gay, and social” women of “the most distinguished rank” who both love Osmyn, they are “so different in character” (II 239) because of their educations. Describing Jumeli, the narrator suggests,

A common observer would have said that the uninformed Jumeli must have been more true to nature than the intelligent Ida; but can an ignorance of nature's laws and forms, render us more alive to her feelings and impressions? Jumeli, in fact, though ignorant, simple, and unenlightened, was sophisticated and prejudiced. In the few ideas and opinions she had acquired, she saw every thing through a false medium—she felt every thing through a wrong impulse, she had no precise ideas of wrong and right. . . . She sung, danced, and played the tympanum and turkish guitar: with a little modification of manner, she would have fully answered for the brilliant circles of another world than that in which she lived, and where she would have found so many who resemble her—who amuse but do not charm—who know not how to enjoy or how to resist. (II 237-38)

In this clearly ironic passage Owenson uses Jumeli to criticize the kind of superficial education customarily given women in “another world,” specifically Britain’s fashionable society, the inference becoming obvious in the fourth volume of the novel when Ida enters London’s social circles. Like Ida, Jumeli learns some basic female accomplishments such as music, but unlike her Greek friend, Jumeli acquires nothing beyond such amusements. The Turkish girl’s schooling leaves her “uninformed,” “ignorant,” and “unenlightened” because she gains only a “few ideas and opinions” that leave her “prejudiced” and incapable of rendering accurate moral judgements. Thus, while Ida’s beauty bears “the intelligence of the awakened soul” (IV 236), Jumeli’s attraction is merely “material” (II 158) because it “blended not . . . the mind of genius, and the soul of feeling” (IV 218); Jumeli’s intellect and sensibility are not cultivated in accordance with nature.

As a result of such faulty schooling, Jumeli suffers a disastrous end. Developing into a coquette whose vanity leads her to encourage Stamati’s advances while she desires Osmyn, the unprincipled Jumeli eventually flees Athens with the Greek hero only to abandon him, since she “knew no tie, no sentiment, but what the momentary impulse gave” (IV 218). Joining a savoyard band in Italy, she degenerates into a life of drinking, debt, and depravity, finally dying pathetically in Ida’s arms near the end of the novel’s final volume (IV 265-66). To confirm Owenson’s pedagogical theory, the narrator explains that Jumeli was “a creature, eminently formed for happiness and virtue” but that she was “brought up in error, and estranged from nature,” subjected to the

“artificial virtues imposed on her by the prejudices of her education” (IV 266). She continues:

The ardent passions received not an elevated direction from the intelligent and awakened mind; and that complexional warmth, which under a happy and natural guidance might have endowed her with the sensibility and genius, which distinguished the character of Ida of Athens, unregulated and debased by its fatal and early bias, hurried her into the low extremes of vice, and reduced her to the last excess of human misery that can overtake or obliterate the generic features of the natural and lovely character of woman. (IV 266-67)

This passage affirms that if Ida symbolizes the potential of woman when free to expand her intellect and sensibility, Jumeli represents that potential wasted because of a poor education. Although Owenson’s sense of patriotic freedom dictates that she displace this sense of loss onto a member of the barbarous Turkish oppressors, Jumeli falls not because of her nationality but because of an “unnatural,” superficial schooling.

In this final volume of the novel wherein Jumeli meets her demise, Owenson transports Ida to London as a means of exposing England to the eye of the foreigner, to the climate of disruption and unfamiliarity which dominates her representation of Greece, and through this movement the criticism of England which has been implicit throughout the narrative, including the tacit attack on British women’s education through Jumeli, becomes explicit. From the beginning of the novel Owenson satirizes English attitudes. The English traveller, whose lack of a name in the first volume underscores his construction as representative of his nation, reveals himself to be racially and sexually biased. A dissipated man of pleasure and fashion, the Englishman may glorify the beauty and passion of the Greek character, but on first sight of Ida he condescendingly assumes her to be ignorant (I 31). Because she is both Greek and female, “he ascribed to her all the indolence, the inanity which so frequently distinguishes the character of oriental women” (I 31). Such an assumption points to a more general prejudice against learned women of any kind. This unsurpassed member of polished society (IV 198), this noble traveller fears that learning will replace feminine grace with pedantry (I 56), so he spurns strength of mind in women (I 126) as much as he rejects

marriage (I 129). As a result, he cannot “associate the idea of a ‘learned lady’” with the beautiful Ida (I 39), finding her unique blend of rationality and sensitivity to be “incongruous” (I 140; II 8). Because Owenson clearly denounces all bias as unnatural, and in light of the obvious privileging of Ida as an idealized woman, Owenson uses Lord B to expose and censure the British prejudice against intellectual women.

When Ida finally reaches London, this satire evolves into a full-scale critique of English customs, laws, and society. The intelligent but inexperienced Ida perceives London as “the great metropolis of the greatest country” (IV 128) because it is “free” and “polished” (IV 73). She flees the oppressive Turkish regime that persecutes her own country in the hopes of a free life with her father, her brothers, and her paramana (her nurse) in England. Yet once in this civilized nation, Ida sees her father thrown into debtor’s prison (IV 102) and finds herself forced toward dependency because as a woman she cannot earn a respectable living (she is stunned to find she cannot support herself with embroidery work as she could have done in Greece [IV 90]). Consequently, as Ida wanders through this metaphorical “desert” (IV 128) on her lonesome “pilgrimage” (IV 1132), Owenson aptly and ironically blurs the distinction between barbarity and civility. Then, when Ida fortuitously receives her inheritance from an estranged maternal uncle (not the diako), Owenson turns her attention to high society. The exotic and once again wealthy Ida enjoys her first London season, and although drawn to the scenes of pleasure she quickly “penetrate[s] beyond the brilliant, but flimsy veil” of fashionable society (IV 164). She recognizes that her popularity among the social elite results solely from her “originality” and novelty; her true merit, her character, genius, and feeling, are “rarely felt or understood” (IV 156). The discerning Ida, whose unprejudiced, external view adds credence to her assessments, concludes that English social life is all prejudice without principle (IV 166), that in these most polished circles of London “the laws of sentiment and nature were expunged from the public code” (IV 168). Through Ida, therefore, the Irish nationalist exposes

as unnatural, hence immoral, the prejudices and superficialities that constitute the basis of English law and life.

As part of this satire of England, Owenson critiques the ladies in “the learned circle of the *bas-bleus*” (IV 169), and through this more specific analysis Owenson details her theory of female genius. If Hannah More rewrites customary notions of intellectual activity, Owenson constructs her own definition of female genius as opposed to talents. In the highest circles of English society Ida expects to find brilliant ladies (IV 170), but instead she discovers only women of talent since genius proves to be rare (IV 174). By *talents* Owenson means mere accomplishments which derive from “that minute attention to those ‘small arts’ and elegant pursuits, which depend upon the lesser faculties of existence” and which “are perfected by mechanical practice” (IV 175). *Genius* is a higher faculty that results from a blended education; it is “that great and expansive developement of mind and feelings which is termed genius” (IV 175). The narrator explains that genius

is the habit of seeing things in the aggregate, and judging of them in the whole. It is that transcendent power of intellect, that vivid quickness of intuition, which at once illuminates and pervades a subject, compares its established combinations, and creates new,—unfolds its difficulties, and ascertains its relations and effects. . . . It is that free expansion of intellect and sensibility, which, unrestrained by the opinions, the authorities, and maxims of others, flows widely and freely to the sacred touch of nature; and warmed and animated by her unerring inspiration, dares to feel, to judge, and to decide for itself. (IV 175-76)

To Owenson genius involves the ability to generalize through penetrating, independent thought, to compare and create, to judge things “in the whole.” Of course, in her address to the novel Owenson denies having any such genius herself, suggesting that she lacks “that unity of pursuit which concentrates the whole powers of the mind to one object, that habit of abstraction” (I v). Such humility may simply be part of what Stevenson identifies as Owenson’s attempt to mask any deficiencies in her narrative (116), although the very title of her novel ironically confirms Owenson’s capacity to view subjects on a general scale. But regardless of Owenson’s personal modesty, Ida as the ideal representative of her sex confirms women’s ability to move beyond the narrow and local

in order to grasp life in its grandiosity; Ida's "thoughts, her ideas, her feelings were generalized and blended with the universe" (II 238). Ida thus possesses that higher faculty of intellect typically associated with the masculine, yet she reconciles that rational facility with "a woman's delicate intuition" (I 53); as the above passage indicates, genius combines the powers of generalization with "that vivid quickness of intuition." Owenson's theory of female genius thereby reconciles Wollstonecraft to More, intellect to instinct.

Through such construction Owenson answers Amelia Opie's complaints regarding the reductiveness of rationality. As discussed previously, *Adeline Mowbray* registers Opie's concern that exclusively privileging reason as the primary mental faculty threatens to lose the individual in the abstract. But Ida, in combining intellect with intuition, is able to recognize the specific within the general, to acknowledge the individual while studying human nature, and she proves her ability to see the abstract yet judge according to the particular in her involvement with Lord B. A libertine and a sophist, Lord B persistently courts Ida's dependence and company, and in response Ida

considered his conduct, not with the eye of a woman of the world, whose opinions and whose conduct are formed upon a certain convenience belonging to the sphere in which she moves, but with that eye of true discernment, which considers human nature, not abstractedly, but according to the circumstances and education under which it acts. She therefore placed the conduct of Lord B\_\_ to its true account. She pitied his error, rather than condemned his faults, and borrowed an indulgence to his failings, from the consciousness of the virtue it had so often tried and proved in herself. (IV 197-98)

The heroine may study human nature, but she does not get lost in abstraction. She judges Lord B not according to generalized principles or codes, but rather in terms of his particular situation, his specific "circumstances and education." Lord B's depraved life and ill view of the female sex is the product of an early disappointment with an unscrupulous woman (I 127-28; IV 251). With the perception of female genius, Ida is able to see through the details of Lord B's behavior, thereby rendering a "true account" of the man, and in the process Ida reforms the dissipated gentleman. In his final letter to the heroine Lord B explains that her example of female genius has "taught [him]

to discard the influence of an unjust and vulgar prejudice" (IV 244) against marriage and intelligent women, and as a rehabilitated, if disappointed, man he then sacrifices his desire for Ida in order to reunite her with Osmyn by informing the rebel of Ida's constancy. It is through his efforts that the narrative finally reaches its happy resolution.

That this reformation of Lord B's character is not prepared for adequately in the narrative is somewhat problematic for the story's logic; its suddenness seems suspect and rather incredible. But the libertine's turnabout is key to Owenson's pedagogical and epistemological analysis. Ida puts her theory of female genius into practice with Lord B, demonstrating her ability to see the general situation without getting lost in abstract speculations, without losing sight of the individual. Such double vision grows out of and is necessary to Owenson's politics of reconciliation. As already discussed, Owenson seeks to reconcile the individual to society, to make the individual's happiness inextricably linked to social felicity, and such reconciliation necessitates the integrated vision produced by a blended education. As Lord B explains in his letter, Ida taught him that "genius in its greatest extent is but to know and to appreciate the wonders and the charms of nature, and to feel and ascertain that line of conduct which contributes to the happiness of the community, to which we belong" (IV 245). Genius allows the individual to see beyond selfish interests, beyond divisive factionalism in order to understand and influence society as a whole. Owenson's theory of female genius, an epistemology which clearly derives from the educational reforms she outlines early in her narrative, plays a crucial role in effecting social cohesion.

As radical and visionary as are such epistemological, pedagogical, and political proposals, however, the limitations of Owenson's argument, as in the other novels in this study, concern the representation of men. As the main players on the political stage of Greece, the men in the novel, particularly Osmyn, are clearly implicated in Owenson's politics of reconciliation. Yet Owenson neither attempts to reconstruct male gender formations nor examine men's pedagogical practices.

She mentions Lord B's classical schooling (I 7) and, as stated above, his "fatal" education from his early association with a fallen woman (IV 251), and she acknowledges Osmyn's tutelage from a monk who turns out to be his father, an instruction which aptly schools the young hero in the virtue of patriotism (I 61). But examining men's education in any detail is not within Owenson's narrative scope. And far from offering men, as she does women, an alternative gender construct which blends masculinity and femininity, Owenson privileges wholly masculinized men. Owenson may applaud Osmyn's passion as supportive of his political fervor, but any excess of feeling renders a man foolish and impulsive, like Stamati whose patriotism "was more influenced by his feelings than by his judgment" (I 55). As Ida and her family flee to England, the archon's illness renders him feminized and useless, collapsing at the very moment when intellect and strength are most required, depending on his daughter to secure their physical and financial situation (IV 42). Clearly, any feminization is deemed a male weakness. Osmyn, on the other hand, represents the masculine ideal, the manly hero who, far from losing himself in feminine madness when rejected by his love, dedicates himself to the fight for freedom (III 57-58). Osmyn is a traditional warrior hero, a dignified soldier (entirely unlike Wollstonecraft's military man) who "blend[s]" his patriotism with "the love of glory" (II 137). Owenson may implicate men as well as women in her political quest for reconciliation, but she reinforces rather than challenges customary gender constructs for the male sex.

Nevertheless, for the early nineteenth-century female Owenson's vision of educational reformation and gender reconstruction carries significant implications. In many ways, despite Ida's proven wisdom and social ability Owenson seems to promote highly traditional roles for women, those of domestic wife and mother. Early in their acquaintance Ida informs the Englishman that "the life of woman is wrapt up in those she loves" (I 150), a sentiment which the narrator confirms by defining woman as "mother, sister, mistress, wife, and child" (II 178), as a being whose existence depends on her relation to man. This recourse to domesticity arises, as do most of the ideological



propositions in the novel, from Owenson's primary concern for community. When the Englishman in the first volume of the novel daringly asks Ida to be his mistress, the heroine patiently explains that love is "the great bond of social happiness" (I 201), and that this love must be realized in marriage because "the happiness of parent, child, and kindred, hang on the consecrated tie of legal, licensed tenderness" (I 202). Much like Opie, Owenson insists on marriage as the "link in the great social chain" that ties parents to children as educators of the next generation of patriots (I 202), thereby preserving "harmony and social concord" (II 201). As evidence that only formal marital bonds can sustain individual and general felicity, Owenson offers Ida's wealthy uncle (the diako's brother) who would die entirely alone but for Ida because his mistresses and bastard son abandoned him to a miserable, solitary end (IV 138-39). To avoid similar distress and ensure lasting happiness, the good Ida, after her many trials and travels, becomes "the most sacred of characters—the character of a wife" (IV 285) and eventually undertakes "the more sacred duties of the mother" (IV 289). In its joyful resolution the narrative seems to comply easily with the basic conventions of domestic fiction.

To underscore even further the primacy of domesticity as the basis of female existence, Owenson appears, in an orthodox manner, to reject women's ambition as contrary to individual and communal happiness. In his depraved efforts to tempt Ida to go to England with him as his mistress, the Englishman persistently appeals to Ida's ambition as her point of vulnerability (I 197; II 3). Although his attempts are in vain, he does correctly identify Ida's supposed weakness; the narrator explains that "perfect as was the education of Ida in the eyes of her doating preceptor, it yet had not escaped that taint of imperfection to which all things human are invariably subject . . . it left her vain!—it left her ambitious" (II 41). Once secure in England with her new inheritance, Ida gives into this weakness, joining the most fashionable social circles because she "ambitioned a distinguished name" (IV 172), seeking fame as a means of being loved (IV 173). When Osmyn appears in London and reawakens her natural sentiments, however, Ida finds public admiration no longer satisfactory

(IV 254). Therefore, when the lovers finally reunite, Ida “abandoned the attractive splendor of her situation, and gave up the world for an individual who had become the world unto her” (IV 286). Because personal ambition for social celebrity turns one’s focus from the community and entirely toward the self, as a woman Ida must sacrifice her ambitious desires for the benefit of domesticity.

Yet Owenson, in the opening address of the novel, unabashedly affirms her own ambition as a writer, as a woman in the public eye (I iv). Although this prefatory assertion may seem another instance wherein Owenson’s personal introductory remarks apparently dispute the thematic implications of the subsequent narrative, there is no contradiction because Owenson rewrites the conventional, masculinized notion of ambition in order to reconcile it with feminine propriety. Ina Ferris explains that during Owenson’s era female ambition challenged the decorum of femininity “through an assumption of masculine power” (48), and that Owenson’s writing was attacked in reviews for her ambition as much as her excessive sensibility (46). Regardless of such hostile critical reaction among her contemporaries, Owenson subtly and strategically dissociates ambition from its masculine identification by asserting the goal of her aspirations as consistent with the demands of respectable domesticity. In one of her letters she declares that “the strongest point of my ambition is to be every inch a woman” (Campbell, *Lady Morgan* 52). As Richard Sha explains, Owenson “dress[es] ambition in feminine clothes,” thereby making it “appear more proper” even while “call[ing] attention to the fact that women were not supposed to have it” (200). Of course, Owenson goes on in her letter to suggest that she avoids the study of chemistry, Greek, and Latin “lest I should not be a very woman,” and that she studies music “rather as a sentiment than a science, and drawing as an instrument rather than an art lest I should have become a musical pedant, or a masculine artist” (Campbell, *Lady Morgan* 52). Such comments, however, seem deeply ironic in light of Owenson’s argument in *Ida* and seem to speak to an effort at self-defence against the author’s many critics. Nevertheless, the point remains that Owenson appropriates ambition and reconciles it with feminine

propriety by distancing it from its masculine associations.

At the same time, she redefines “woman,” the proper goal of female ambition, in order to gain access for her sex to extended capacities and greater public agency. At the close of the novel Ida assumes many roles, but she remains first and foremost a woman. The narrator explains, “Ida, alternately a patriot heroine,—a tender mistress,—an affectionate daughter,—a votarist of pleasure,—an adoring wife,—and an exemplary mother, was still in all and each, a Woman!” (IV 289-90). Ida may actively guide her family through the harsh desert of English life, but in the end, as Osmyn has previously explained (II 124), “if it is for man to perform great actions, it is for woman to inspire them!” (IV 290); to be female is to be passive. However, although the narrator suggests that Ida “abandoned . . . the world” upon marriage (IV 286), the heroine does not retreat into reclusive domestic passivity. On the contrary, the Athenian woman “left the luxury of a court to follow her husband amidst the toil and hardship of a camp” (IV 288). Ida, the ideal incarnation of woman in her fullest potential, may shield, cheer, and inspire her husband (IV 289), but she does so not from a secure home remote from public life, but rather from the heart of a Russian military encampment. Owenson allows Ida such civic involvement by scripting patriotism as a respectable feminine virtue. Referring to Ida the narrator suggests that “patriotism . . . was all a woman’s sentiment,” that rather than narrow party politics, cabinets, or legislative ambition, Ida’s feminine, maternal interests naturally concern her country’s general welfare (II 44). This declaration echoes Owenson’s assertion in *Patriotic Sketches of Ireland* (1807) that “politics can never be a woman’s science; but patriotism must naturally be a woman’s sentiment” (qtd. in Sha 200).<sup>6</sup> As Jeanne Moskal explains (via Ferris), Owenson genders the categories of politics and patriotism in order to clear “a space for herself [and women] to speak on political matters, by claiming it as only the (feminine) role of patriot” (184), the “role of advocate for another’s cause” (171). By feminizing patriotism Owenson thus constructs a respectable avenue for women to enter public life. Ida may

teach her brothers (IV 268) and offer charity to debtors and strangers (IV 146) in traditional feminine form, but she also makes her presence and not just her influence felt beyond the domestic circle, on the battlefield where political and cultural change gain immediacy and potency. In this manner, Owenson boldly and decisively takes the domestic to the public by granting women entrance to civic responsibility and possibility through respectable patriotic duty.

Compared to the other women writers in this study, then, Sydney Owenson offers the most overt assertion of reconciliation and blending as the basis of educational reform and gender reconstruction for the early nineteenth-century woman because of Owenson's nationalistic politics. Her Irish nationalism, her politics of reconciliation, creates a climate of negotiation in which boundaries are blurred, distinctions are challenged, and, consequently, alternatives are readily conceived. In particular, Owenson's theory of female genius, which arises directly from her concern for social cohesion, effectively blurs gendered epistemological boundaries as a means of increasing women's agency. By constructing women of genius, women who have the benefit of a blended education, as active, influential patriots, Owenson attempts to secure for women a respectable means of entering politics and the public realm while maintaining their roles within the domestic sphere. The creator of the national tale may seek religious and political freedom through her patriotic discourse, but *Ida* demonstrates that Owenson's emancipatory quest also extends to women's education and gender politics.

With her 1814 publication of *Discipline*, Mary Brunton takes my analysis of gender politics and educational reform in early nineteenth-century Britain to Scotland. Like Owenson's novel, Brunton's *Discipline* relies on a fervent sense of nationalism for its political and thematic musings; the Scottish writer's love of country features prominently in her conception of community and social relations. To this patriotic bias Brunton, the wife of a Scottish clergyman, adds a pervasive and

dominant religiosity. Like Hannah More before her, Brunton brings Evangelical piety to her writing, or more precisely in Brunton's case, a Methodist philosophy as the justification for and basis of her discourse, claiming that *Discipline* aims "to show the means through which, when self-control has been neglected, the mind must be trained by suffering, before it can hope for usefulness or for true enjoyment" (qtd. in Luria, Introduction 8). This religious sensitivity combines with Brunton's politics of nation to define the subversive as well as orthodox implications of *Discipline's* pedagogical and gender politics.

Brunton was not a prolific writer, completing only two novels and beginning a third before her death following childbirth in 1818. Although the devout Brunton did not seek fame, claiming that she "would sooner exhibit as a rope dancer" than gain notoriety as a literary woman in light of all the negative implications such female celebrity entailed (qtd. in Todd, *Sign of Angellica* 5), her novels were nonetheless highly popular. Ann Jones explains that Brunton, encouraged by the success of More's *Coelebs*, "decided to write a religious novel of her own," and that this first work, *Self-Control*, "caused such a sensation in Edinburgh in 1811 when it was published anonymously that the first edition was sold out in a month" (80). Three years later *Discipline*, which tells the story of the good-hearted but ill-educated Ellen Percy who must convert to Methodism and submit to a lifelong process of instruction through suffering in order to become worthy of the novel's pious, responsible hero, Mr Maitland/Henry Graham, was likewise to enjoy "great success" (Spender, *Mothers* 337). Although Brunton suspected that her obtrusive moralizing would deter readers, "it is in fact likely," according to Ann Jones, "that the religious element gained her more readers than it lost her" (106-07). Still relatively new to the novel as genre, this religious didacticism and stringent morality situated Brunton's works well within the acceptable domain of the proper novel, a generic form which "promulgates—and itself enacts—the restrained values of propriety," rather than the more suspect arena of the ordinary novel, as Ina Ferris demonstrates on the basis of

contemporary reviews (54). Seeming thus “proper,” Brunton’s novels were well-regarded; indeed, the author’s obituary in the *Edinburgh Evening Courant* claims that “since her books were published, immorality in novels ceased for some years” (McKerrow 172). The Scottish writer seems clearly aligned with restrictive ideology.

Three more recent analyses, however, tend to expose the disruptive, feminist undercurrents of Brunton’s narrative. Sarah Smith’s exploration of Brunton’s definitions of work and social value, Katherine Sobba Green’s discussion of the evolving feminist consciousness of the heroine, and Caroline Gonda’s brief but illuminating analysis of Brunton’s novel in her examination of father-daughter relationships in women’s fiction offer provocative assessments of *Discipline*’s challenges to customary dictates concerning the early nineteenth-century woman. Yet among the handful of current critics who examine the Scottish writer, there is much disagreement as to the literary merit of Brunton’s works. Sarah Smith, who applauds Brunton’s clever manipulations of female economics, claims that Brunton’s talents are “modest” (41), that she is not a distinguished novelist (54), and Ann Jones, who asserts that Brunton contributes to the development of the novel through her “penetrating psychological approach to characterization” (113), suggests that Brunton’s novels are “minor, flawed and outdated” (113). In contrast, Katherine Sobba Green identifies Brunton “as one of the better novelists of the early nineteenth century” (120) who ranks among the best courtship novelists alongside Lennox, Burney, Edgeworth, and Austen (121), and Dale Spender describes Brunton as “first-rate” (*Mothers* 325). Nevertheless, such ideologically based discussions of value aside, the majority of critics unite to acknowledge the significance of Brunton’s influence as novelist on Jane Austen.<sup>7</sup> Also worthy of critical note in *Discipline* is Brunton’s representation of the Scottish Highlands. The novel arrived on the literary market mere months after Scott’s *Waverley*, and although Brunton worried that “she might be accused of borrowing from his material” (McKerrow 170), her depictions of Scottish scenery and social commentary were individual (S.

Smith 54) and undoubtedly “added to the novel’s success” (A. Jones 109).<sup>8</sup> As contemporary critics suggest, then, apart from any potential feminist leanings, *Discipline*’s religious tenor, its psychological realism, and the nationalistic representations of Scotland clearly confirm the innovative cast of Brunton’s discourse despite her ostensible conservatism.

To such analysis I would add Brunton’s representations of education and gender as evidence of her resistance to accepted norms and her disruptive inventiveness. Like other women writers, Brunton rejects women’s fashionable education, representing such superficial instruction as unable to provide women with morality or character. Inhibited by such faulty schooling, the heroine must undergo a substantial re-education as part of her Methodist conversion, an intensive instruction which embraces typically masculine pedagogical practices in both content and methodology. In thus re-educating Ellen, Brunton feminizes reason in order to render it compatible with religion as well as allow women access to rationality, and she rewrites femininity, divesting it of its negative associations with cunning, willfulness, and vanity, constructing the feminine instead as potentially and properly indicative of sincerity, simplicity, and singleness of heart. Brunton then uses this alternative gender construct, Ellen as a woman of firm rationality and rehabilitated femininity, to propose radical reconfigurations of women’s agency and autonomy. Supported by Christian notions of usefulness, Brunton reaches beyond More’s insistence on charity (here referred to as liberality) as the basis of women’s public participation to argue for women’s economic independence and active employment in the mercantile workforce, an argument which combines with Brunton’s unique appreciation of spinsterhood to defy openly the conventional construction of domesticity as women’s primary vocation. What is more, in moving her working heroine to Scotland Brunton combines her politics of nation with her religious bias as a means of extending her reconstructive efforts beyond the individual, beyond the female sex, to the community as a whole; through her representation of the Graham clan, the Scottish novelist rewrites community as family, constructing an alternative

mode of social cohesion which relies upon communal bonds of love and equality. Because this utopian Scottish community also maintains a decisively patriarchal basis, however, privileging a highly masculinized, paternal ideal of civic leadership, any sense of equality is illusory, and women, determined by their filial obedience, remain subordinated despite their alternative social roles. This submission to the demands of the paternal marks the limits of Brunton's reconstruction, but more significant, I suggest, than the difficulties such patriarchal collusion presents to Brunton's efforts at closure are the epistemological implications which support such a reactionary gesture. More than any other writer in this study, including Hannah More, Brunton, as the basis of her feminist argument, subsumes rationality in religion; from Wollstonecraft to Brunton, the rationale among women writers for educational and gender reform slowly shifts in emphasis from a matter of rights to one of spirituality, and this gradual ideological metamorphosis, I suggest, creates an avenue for the gestation of Victorian sexual repression and mutual exclusivity of gender constructions. *Discipline* thus stands as an apt example of the radical as well as orthodox impulses informing early nineteenth-century women's fiction.

Brunton begins her complicated novel with Ellen Percy, who narrates her story in retrospect, recalling her early childhood. From her youngest days the open, sincere, beautiful Ellen is "proud, petulant, and rebellious" (3), a spoiled, indulged girl who manipulates and tyrannizes her parents and servants (5). Mr Percy, in particular, pampers his only child, encouraging her vanity and desire for exhibition (4), allowing the young Ellen to attend a play against her mother's wishes (7), an outing which results in Mrs Percy's death from a fever brought home by the insolent child (9). But Mrs Percy is no more a disciplinarian than her husband. The pious and worthy woman, Ellen later learns, uses her charitable hours to teach "mantua-making and morality" to the poor Mrs Wells's daughters (27), yet Mrs Percy, because of "her too partial fondness" for Ellen (6), fails to inculcate a similar sense of duty and religiosity in her business-class daughter. Upon Mrs Percy's death, Ellen's



intellectual and moral schooling is left solely to her father, “a man of business” who “seek[s] domestic peace and relaxation” in his hours away from “the toil and bustle of commerce,” a desire which proves “wholly incompatible with the correction of a spoiled child” (6). A self-made man with a bias against people of rank, Mr Percy is, in Dale Spender’s words, “too much part of the world,” a man who “attaches too much importance to money” and not enough to the discipline of his daughter (*Mothers* 335). As a result of this initial schooling at the hands of her neglectful parents, Ellen develops into an impetuous, willful, self-important child devoid of principle and judgement.

Soon frustrated with the spoiled daughter of his own creation, Mr Percy sends Ellen to boarding school to become a fashionable lady (12). By this point in my study, Brunton’s assessment of the typical boarding school education should seem familiar; she presents the superficial instruction Ellen receives at school as an aggravation of rather than a remedy for the heroine’s destructive behaviors and characteristics. Ellen explains,

We were taught the French and Italian languages; but, in as far as was compatible with these acquisitions, we remained in ignorance of the accurate science, or elegant literature to which they might have introduced us. We learnt to draw landscape; but, secluded from the fair originals of nature, we gained not one idea from the art, except such as were purely mechanical. (17)

Ellen’s education focuses on customary feminine accomplishments, such as languages and drawing, rather than a substantive, comprehensive curriculum, and even those accomplishments receive only superficial, “mechanical” attention rather than penetrating analysis. Ellen goes on to explain that rather than detailed instruction in morality, she learns to pay lip-service to religion, merely repeating one page of the Catechism by rote every Sunday, receiving far more instruction “in the art of wearing our clothes fashionably, and arranging our decorations with grace and effect” (17). Through a full seven years of such tutelage, Ellen develops only a single proficiency, music (17), and to this accomplishment she dedicates a wasteful “seven hours a day” (18). To such frivolity the teachers add an unhealthy sense of competition, initiating the “mischievous” rivalry between Ellen and Lady

Maria de Burgh which will prove so detrimental to Ellen in the years to follow (13). In short, Ellen's education leaves the heroine's reason, as well as her morality, "in deep sleep" (37), so that when she is forced to become a governess, she is entirely ill-fitted to educate "a rational and accountable being" (211). After much suffering Ellen concludes that women's education consists of the "knowledge of the various arts of squandering time" (244) and that her own instruction reduced her to "heartless dissipation" (245). For Ellen Percy a fashionable boarding school education leads to a life of pride, vanity, and impropriety.

To emphasize the destructiveness and degradation of such female pedagogy, Brunton employs Juliet Arnold, Ellen's schoolmate, in one of the many female pairings in the novel. Whereas Ellen, at least during her early years, is set to inherit her father's sizeable fortune, Juliet is the daughter of a dead insurance broker (15), and as a result of her dependent situation, securing her financial well-being through a profitable marriage is paramount to Juliet. Her brother thus places her in boarding school where she is "educated to be married" (16). Ellen as narrator explains,

Let no simple reader, trained by an antiquated grandmother in the country, imagine my meaning to be that Miss Arnold was practised in the domestic, the economical, the submissive virtues . . . I only mean that Miss Arnold was taught accomplishments which were deemed likely to attract notice and admiration; that she knew what to withdraw from the view, and what to prepare for exhibition; that she was properly instructed in the value of settlements; and duly convinced of the degradation and misery of failure in the grand purpose of a lady's existence. (16)

Like Ellen, Juliet is educated in "accomplishments," so that Miss Arnold learns nothing of practical usefulness in boarding school, nothing of domestic economy or even self-effacing female virtues. Instead, her education develops her vanity, cunning, and duplicity; it cultivates her mercenary nature and confirms that her sole purpose is to marry for rank and wealth. Thus Juliet, whose "nature had done much to qualify [her] for her profession" (16), becomes a manipulative, self-serving, unprincipled social climber, and Ellen's inability or refusal to recognize Juliet's disingenuousness provides many poignant moments of Austen-like irony in the opening episodes of the novel. Finally

proving herself a false friend by abandoning Ellen when Mr Percy kills himself after his bankruptcy (168), Juliet reappears at the end of the novel deserted and dying with a son whose noble father, Lord Glendower, refuses to acknowledge his paternity; yet even in this state of destitution Juliet remains a conniving flatterer (306), “discontented and peevish” (317), refusing to help Ellen earn their subsistence (317-18) while demanding expensive burgundy to satisfy her selfish whims (322), driven by vanity and revenge (319). In what Katherine Sobba Green defines as “an unusual poetic justice” (132), Brunton makes the aristocratic rake, Glendower, accept responsibility for Juliet’s son by sanctioning Juliet’s marriage and providing for the child’s legitimacy (328); however, for her part the anti-heroine dies unrepentant and unreformed (333). Juliet’s experience confirms the necessity of Ellen’s conversion and re-education.

Then, of course, there is Mrs Boswell, an even more greatly exaggerated example of an ill-educated woman gone awry. When Ellen goes to Edinburgh to find work, she discovers herself in the home of the opulent Boswells as governess to their spoiled daughter, “an exaggerated version of the younger Ellen” (Gonda 192). Mrs Boswell seeks a fashionable education for her child—instruction in piano, singing, French, and geography (255)—because she clearly is a product of such limited schooling. Ellen explains that “Six pages a week of a novel, or of the *Lady’s Magazine*, were the utmost extent of [Mrs Boswell’s] reading. She did nothing; therefore we could have no fellowship of employment. She thought nothing; therefore we could have no intercourse of mind” (260-61). Useless in deed and conversation, Mrs Boswell becomes a domestic tyrant, “a worst-case scenario of what social custom encourages in women” (K. Green 130). She manipulates and deceives, entirely dominating her timid husband, refusing to speak to him for days on end, relenting only when she requires money (259). A slave to her suspicion, Mrs Boswell even has Ellen imprisoned in a madhouse when Mr Boswell’s admiration for the young governess becomes apparent. Sarah Smith suggests that Mrs Boswell “is a case study in the psychopathology of

dependence,” that “untrained and uneducated for anything but marriage, Mrs Boswell has chosen marriage as the only avenue to power,” and she exercises that power through and over her husband (52). Indeed, Mrs Boswell embodies the tyranny of dependence, and as a resident of Edinburgh (unlike Ellen and Juliet who receive their instruction in England), the terrifying shrew demonstrates that a poor education need not be a function of nationality.

As for Brunton’s heroine, a fashionable education does not transform Ellen into either a sadistic Mrs Boswell or a duplicitous Juliet, but it does burden her with a host of problems. Leaving boarding school to enter fashionable society, Ellen, dominated by her vanity and pride and utterly lacking judgement, flirts with Lord Frederick de Burgh to anger her rival and his sister, Lady Maria, improperly incurs a secret debt to the mercenary Lord at an auction (77), and, after permitting her would-be suitor to ply her with liquor at a masquerade ball and proposition her in a private room (93-94),<sup>9</sup> prepares to defy her father (who has already rejected Lord Frederick’s request for Ellen) and elope to Scotland with this man she does not love (158-60). In the process, she allows Juliet as well as Lord Frederick’s fashionable but self-serving aunt, Lady St Edmunds, to manipulate and mislead her while ignoring the good advice of her mother’s wise, moral friend, Miss Mortimer, and she alienates the upstanding Mr Maitland, who later reveals himself to be the Scottish Highland Chieftain, Henry Graham, with her trickery and attempts at romantic conquest until she loses his approbation. Ellen is a woman of many faults, all of which, she explains, may be traced “to certain accidents in my early education” (3), and such weaknesses lead her to impropriety and the brink of immorality.

Therefore, reformation of the heroine, reclaiming her from these dissipated ways, necessitates a stern re-education initiated through the influence of the pious Miss Mortimer. With her father dead, her fortune lost, and her society friends gone, Ellen goes to Miss Mortimer, and in her lowly state Ellen begins to listen to the older woman’s counsel (183). As part of the slow,

religious conversion which the heroine experiences at her friend's cottage, Ellen receives a rational, as well as a spiritual, schooling. Brunton uses Miss Mortimer to feminize reason in order to make it compatible with religion and available to women, including Ellen. Never one to seek authority, Miss Mortimer teaches by example, leaving Ellen to her conscience rather than trying to control her through direct advice. Prior to her fall Ellen finds such a "timid, circuitous" method of teaching frustrating and useless (104), but once awakened to a religious sensitivity Ellen appreciates her mentor's delicacy. Ellen explains,

She never willingly oppressed me with a sense of her superiority,—never upbraided my cold reception of doctrines which I was not yet fitted to receive . . . but answered my questions in terms direct and perspicuous; opposed my doubts and prejudices with meek reason; represented the condition of the worst of mankind as admitting of hope,—that of the best, as implying warfare. (183)

Miss Mortimer's reason is neither competitive, nor aggressive, nor coercive, nor oppressive; rather, it is "meek" and unassuming, an intellect that allows Ellen's reason to develop according to its own concerns at its own rate. In her selfless manner, Ellen's mentor cultivates the intellect not through judgement or force, but through timid guidance.

By thus casting rationality in feminine terms, Brunton justifies granting women access to pedagogical practices usually reserved for the male sex; that is, at Miss Mortimer's cottage Ellen receives a masculine education in subject matter and in methodology. Ellen, as part of her spiritual awakening, may read the Bible and other religious texts, but she also studies "history, travels, or criticism" as well as "books of instruction and harmless entertainment" (190); in her process of "serious study," she even writes "abstracts of what [she] read" (190). Through Miss Mortimer's doctor, Mr Sidney, Ellen learns "the first rudiments of science," using Sidney's library and apparatus to study chemistry (199). In exploring such substantial subjects through disciplined study, Ellen develops an understanding of "soundness or vigour" (190) and "a habit of patient enquiry" which proves, in defiance of her earlier education, that "the prospect of exhibition is not necessary to the

interest of study" (199). In terms of the novel's dominating metaphor of light/vision/penetration as indicative of both reason and religiosity, Ellen's "darkened understanding" (181) gradually gives way through intellectual study to "newly acquired powers of sight" (184). Of course, the "education for eternity" is a lifelong project (207). Ellen will spend the rest of the novel continuing to learn through experience, through numerous trials and sufferings, struggling with her vanity even in the final pages of the novel (she is proud "that [her] hand and arm were quite as beautiful as ever" during her first breakfast with Henry Graham [370]). Nevertheless, the reformatory process for Ellen Percy begins with this re-schooling in rationality which she receives as part of her religious conversion.

While reconstructing rationality in order to make it accessible to women, moreover, Brunton also rehabilitates the feminine. For all Ellen's many faults, Brunton makes it clear from the beginning that the heroine has many feminine virtues as well, qualities which the designing Juliet lacks. Despite her vanity and pride, Ellen is a woman of conscience with "a frank and open nature" (79) and "habits of sincerity" (52), a woman of "*naïf* sensibility" (99) who shares her mother's "simplicity and truth" and "warm affections" (109). The discerning Miss Mortimer informs the young woman that "No part of your character is more striking than your perfect singleness of heart" (46), a sentiment Maitland later confirms through his sister, Charlotte Graham, who tells Ellen that Henry/Maitland sees in Miss Percy "a thousand little *womanlinesses*" including "that delightful warmth and singleness of heart" (369). Indeed, in his initial declaration of his feelings Maitland informs Ellen that he loves her not for her beauty, as the child of fashion might expect (139), but for her "playful simplicity, [her] want of all design, [her] perfect transparency of mind" (140). As Ellen begins her reformation, therefore, as her spiritual awakening reveals to her the errors of her fashionable ways and she seeks a more responsible life, Brunton gradually divests the feminine of its negative associations (with vanity and indulgence, for example) by rewriting it through Ellen's transformation as sincerity, simplicity, constancy, and affection. The reformed Ellen thus comes to

represent an alternative gender construct, a woman of competent rationality and rehabilitated femininity.

Once this transformation is initiated, Brunton removes Ellen from the private world of Miss Mortimer's country cottage and places the heroine in the public arena of the working world; left alone after Miss Mortimer's death, Ellen moves to Edinburgh to seek employment as a governess. Brunton uses Ellen's new situation to extend her reformative efforts beyond creating an alternative gender construct to rewriting women as social beings through the category of work. As discussed in this section on More, Evangelical doctrine supports a belief in usefulness, in charitable works and active utility in the social world as coincident with religious faith (M. Butler 243). In *Discipline* Brunton takes this Christian concept and exploits its egalitarian basis to grant women a means of access to public agency and equality. In her comprehensive and persuasive discussion of Brunton's representations of value and work in the novel, Sarah Smith claims that Brunton redefines work or activity according to spiritual rather than secular notions of value in order to demonstrate that usefulness cannot be measured by size, scale, or any other secular yardstick (49-50). Mr Percy, the money-driven mercantile man, may thrive on determinations of scale, suggesting that "When a man has thousands, and tens of thousands passing through his hands every day, it gives him a liberal way of thinking. But as for a woman, who never was mistress of a hundred pounds at a time, what can she know of liberality?" (70), but Miss Mortimer proves his vision of charity limited when she, through her small means, saves Percy's own daughter (S. Smith 50). Instead of size, Brunton privileges goodness, whether on a small or grand scale, as the proper measure of usefulness, and such a standard applies equally to men and women as Maitland and Miss Mortimer confirm in their discussion of their personal religious quests (128); both sexes are judged according to the goodness of their actions regardless of the form or scope that usefulness takes. As Sarah Smith suggests, in Brunton's novel, "men and women have the same moral duties, though they are likely to hold

different offices" (53). Maitland's liberality, for example, leads the Indian merchant who has owned slaves to act upon his abolitionist beliefs, first speaking in the English senate (117) and then, when these political efforts fail, travelling to Africa to gather knowledge and more effectively combat the slave trade (198). Through this character, the Methodist Brunton utters a direct and unequivocal statement censuring the evils of slavery, thereby offering a more detailed and comprehensive discussion of colonialism than any of the other authors in my study. In her turn, Ellen may not aid a country or race, but she helps a lone woman, Cecil Graham, regain her most prized possession, her winding-sheet (239), and Brunton applauds Ellen's efforts as she does Maitland's. In thus challenging capitalistic notions of value by affirming a non-quantitative definition of usefulness, Brunton offers women not only a means to social utility in the form of charitable works, but also a public forum in which they can function as men's equals.

But Brunton's religious perception of usefulness, unlike More's, extends beyond this notion of liberality or charity to include women's formal employment, to affirm work that earns economic independence for women. Brunton clearly criticizes the misplaced values of mercantile capitalism, particularly through Mr Percy whose inability to appreciate anything other than money causes him to desert his daughter by killing himself on the heels of his bankruptcy. As Ellen, because of her father's abandonment and destitution, is compelled to enter the workforce, this economic criticism becomes specifically feminist. Discovering that she needs to support herself, Ellen laments, "What channel had the customs of society left open to the industry of woman?" (211). Left to her own devices Ellen realizes that she is not educated for anything useful; all she can do is offer other young girls the same inadequate education she was given (211). Through Ellen's desperation Brunton identifies, in Gonda's words, "the last and greatest obstacle to women's bids for independence—that 'industry' and 'woman' are mutually exclusive terms at any social level but the lowest" (177). In fact, if Ellen's middle-class upbringing works against her in her job search, her beauty does as well



(Gonda 194); as would-be governess, the beautiful Ellen represents temptation to young men such as Henry Murray (230) and unwelcome competition to young women (252). But if Ellen's limited education and class status inhibit her efforts to find employment, so does the mercantile market; she says, "Edinburgh, at that time, contained no market for the fruits of feminine ingenuity" (244). Unable to find work as a governess, Ellen actually does use her "ingenuity" to become a small businesswoman, making toys to earn a paltry living (303), but her ceaseless struggle and minimal success demonstrates that the capitalist market and education system work together to maintain female dependency. Through Ellen's dismal experience, Brunton voices a strong feminist argument in favor of increasing women's employment opportunities.

In a further challenge to domestic ideology, Brunton also disrupts customary beliefs in the primacy of marriage as the basis of female happiness and fulfilment. As heroine of a domestic novel Ellen has a highly unusual attitude to marriage. Early in her journey, while still flirting dangerously with Lord Frederick whom she has no intention of ever wedding, Ellen says, "Marriage is like sin; if we often allow it to be presented to our view, we learn to look without starting" (41). Likening matrimony to a vice to which one must become accustomed, Ellen does not sound like the typical domestic heroine who seeks marriage as her principal and virtuous vocation. On the contrary, Ellen, far from a sentimental woman lost in the romance of matrimony, foregrounds the practical, economic realities of marriage, referring to conjugal union as "a heartless business" (137), claiming that she "would far rather earn my bread by labour than by marriage" (355). Of course, these latter statements must be read in the context of Ellen's particular situation; Brunton's heroine believes she has lost the only man she has deemed worthy of marriage, Maitland, so that a certain irony colors her resistance to matrimonial demands. Nevertheless, Ellen's persistent suspicion of the supposed benefits of wedded unions marks the singularity of Brunton's perception of marriage.

More pointedly, *Discipline's* representation of spinsters connotes a peculiar sympathy for

the unmarried woman. In *Miss Mortimer and Charlotte Graham*, Brunton presents two spinsters who are neither pitiful, nor redundant, nor unhappy as befits the early nineteenth-century stereotype of the unmarried woman; rather, they are productive and contented. The patient and kind Miss Mortimer may lack romantic love, but she nonetheless lives a full life, giving wise counsel, doing charitable deeds (60), finally dying the peaceful death of a virtuous woman (209). Because of her overwhelming religiosity, however, Miss Mortimer may seem more a spiritual creature than a flesh and blood woman. Charlotte Graham, on the other hand, as Henry's sister and chief woman of the Graham clan, is entirely of this world; she is active in her Highland community and even reaches into Edinburgh to find Ellen upon Henry's request. A single woman whose figure is too "large" and "angular" to be described as "feminine beauty" (328), Charlotte is no retiring coquette, but neither is she an Amazonian aberration like Hannah More's Miss Sparkes. The single Charlotte is a "majestic," "exquisite," wise, graceful, polished, pious, sweet woman (328-29) who loves her Highland home patriotically (333) and who welcomes everyone maternally into the family fold. At the close of the novel, after years have passed and Ellen has become, despite her earlier misgivings concerning domestic bliss, a happily married mother of five, the heroine says of the now even older Charlotte, "Some misses lately arrived from a boarding-school, have begun to call my sister an old maid; yet I do not perceive that the cabalistic term has produced any ill effect on Charlotte's temper, or on her happiness" (375). Charlotte Graham demonstrates in defiance of conventional domestic ideology that marriage is not necessary for female happiness or fulfilment. Without overtly denying marriage, while satisfying the demands of domestic fiction by uniting the hero and heroine in wedded harmony, Brunton offers women alternative modes of being and agency which challenge early nineteenth-century norms of female behavior and identity.

Therefore, although Brunton was embraced by her contemporaries as a rather conservative writer, her attempts in *Discipline* at reconfiguring the customary sex and gender constructions

determining the early nineteenth-century woman are highly disruptive. In this novel Brunton employs her arguments for educational reforms, like other women writers before her, to reconstruct dominant gender representations in order to grant women increased agency and independence beyond the limits of domestic ideology. My discussion of Charlotte Graham, however, brings my study of *Discipline* to the Highland section of the novel, and it is in this concluding portion of the text, as Brunton extends her reformist efforts from the individual and the female sex to the community, that her religious bias asserts itself to circumscribe the progressive potential of her narrative.

As Brunton moves her narrative from the city to the country, from Edinburgh to the Highlands, her sense of nation erupts to idealize and romanticize the Highland scenery and people. In various ways Brunton has been preparing the reader for this idealization of the Scottish Highlands throughout the novel. When Ellen first meets Maitland, although the impudent girl is unable to appreciate the older man's worth, everything about the virtuous hero bespeaks a "Scotchman" (23). Later, as Ellen's reformation begins she is surprised and impressed with Mrs Campbell, a poor Scottish woman who will help Ellen and Juliet in Edinburgh, because the working-class woman possesses "knowledge of the principles of religion," a wisdom that is "wonderful in a person of her rank" (188). Most specifically, when in Edinburgh Ellen meets Cecil Graham as precursor to Charlotte, and the romance of the Highlands begins to dominate the text. Cecil, as a tenant and member of the Graham clan, is "an entirely new specimen of human character" to Ellen, "an odd mixture of good sense and superstition . . . of shrewd observation, and a kind of romantic abstraction from sensible objects" (246). This extraordinary woman teaches her native Gaelic to Ellen (246), regaling the English-born heroine with romantic "tales of cattle stealing, marriage customs, and Highland pride, honor, and loyalty" (A. Jones 108). She is an exotic, mystical creature who gives Ellen a protective talisman upon their final meeting in the city (263) and who prophesies Ellen's and Henry's ordained union (247, 358). Ellen is thus prepared for the wonder of the Highland people,

and although her English prejudice causes her to expect to be greeted by “barbarians” when she arrives her first night at a Highland inn (342), the splendour of the country and inhabitants of Glen Eredine soon confirm the grandeur of this wondrous place. Brunton’s portrait of the Highlands strongly appeals to a romantic appreciation of the Scottish character.

In large part, this idealization of the Highland people derives from the egalitarian mix of classes Ellen discovers at Eredine. In this Highland episode Brunton combines her sense of nationalism and her moral sensitivity to create a new vision of community, to rewrite the basis of social cohesion through the Highland clan. Again, Brunton attempts to prepare the reader for the singularity of the Highlands. Despite Ellen’s harsh treatment as a working woman in Edinburgh, when Charlotte introduces the heroine to Scottish polite society Ellen is delighted to find that “persons of all ranks” mingle to greet her hospitably (241). In the Highlands such unity across divisions of class and rank entirely defines social relations. When arriving at the inn on the way to Castle Eredine, Ellen is taken aback as the innkeeper, who Charlotte informs her is a gentleman, seats himself boldly between the two women (343). Ellen concludes, “It was plain that Miss Graham and I affixed somewhat different ideas to the word ‘gentleman’” (344). In fact, Ellen soon discovers that she has no understanding of the social relations in the Highlands at all. The Highlanders clearly recognize rank, the servants sent from the Castle to escort the women home being careful never to speak unless addressed first by Charlotte, yet the daughter of the Chieftain consistently refers to her servants, as they refer to her and Henry, as “friend” (345). Ellen is amazed at the bonds between ranks in this exotic territory, saying, “I never saw any thing like affection in servants, except in a novel” (346), yet such fondness clearly defines communal connection in Glen Eredine; Cecil’s husband, James/Jemmy, for example, selflessly and voluntarily follows Henry’s older brother Kenneth to battle in a dedicated effort to protect the beloved leader (355). The Highland community clearly functions in a manner unfamiliar to English society (except through the jaundiced eyes of a

Dr. Johnson!).

More specifically, Glen Eredine boasts ties of familial love as the basis of their communal fellowship. Although people of the Glen live as tenant-farmers on the land surrounding Castle Eredine, Ellen explains that "Feudal habits were extinct; and the days were long since gone, when bands of kinsmen, united in one great family, repaid hospitality and protection with more than filial veneration and love" (352). People of the lower orders in the Highlands feel no sense of feudal obligation for the "hospitality and protection" given by the Grahams of Castle Eredine; rather, they embrace their ties to their social superiors because they love and respect the Grahams. With these kinds of familial bonds as the basis of community, all ranks mix freely at Castle Eredine to serve the common good, as Brunton demonstrates during the harvest party. With their feelings of "filial veneration and love," the tenantry of the Glen gladly assemble "to cut down the landlord's corn; a service which they were bound to perform without hire" (353). With "animating hilarity," they perform their "unrewarded labor" to "the sound of the bagpipe," telling legends and celebrating as they work (354). This sense of togetherness, moreover, defines the civic attitude of the highest ranking members of the community as well as the lower orders; Mr Graham, Henry's father, the patriarch of the noblest family in the Glen, joins in the work and the story-telling with his servants "without incurring the slightest danger of forfeiting respect by condescension" (354). Because of such pervasive feelings of kinship, distinctions of class and rank, while maintained, are mollified, as are divisions of nationality. In conciliatory fashion not unlike that which typifies the works of Scott and Owenson, Brunton chooses as her hero and the noble leader of his people Henry, the son of an English mother and Scottish father (346), and this noble man of mixed parentage marries an English woman of the middling ranks. Cecil's would-be lover, Robert, explains that the Highlanders can easily embrace Ellen, an outsider and a "Saxon," as their Chieftain's wife (359), since they hold no prejudice against the English (as the English do against the Scots [327]), the community

welcoming the heroine into their fold and making her feel like a native within a week (349). Glen Eredine is a community of kindred and friends united “by the ties of relationship” and shared interests which go far toward dissolving divisions of rank and nationality (375). In short, through the Graham clan Brunton rewrites community as family.

The problem is, however, that this “family” is at once isolated and decidedly patriarchal. In her analysis of the Graham clan, Caroline Gonda suggests that “Looking out from her marriage and immediate family, Ellen’s narrative concludes by celebrating this alternative society” (192), but Gonda fails to recognize the difficulties implicit in Brunton’s social “alternative.” In her attempt to construct an ideal community, Brunton surpasses Wollstonecraft’s and Opie’s similarly utopian efforts in *The Wrongs of Woman* and *Adeline Mowbray* respectively by at least including men in *Discipline*’s perfect society. But like Wollstonecraft’s and Opie’s novels, Brunton’s text depends on romantically withdrawing from rather than confronting the social problems the author identifies. Throughout the novel Brunton offers harsh criticism of city life, especially the fashionable society of London, but even Edinburgh’s social world which Ellen finds “agreeably amusing” and less superficial than London high life (335) proves harsh and divisive; one need only recall Mrs St Clare and Mrs Boswell to confirm the dark side of Edinburgh. As already discussed, part of this attack on fashionable society is directed specifically at commerce and the world of business, a critique which culminates in Charlotte’s vehement rejection of Henry’s “upstart mercantile name,” Maitland (367). Although Henry brings his sense of virtue and fair play to the business world, Charlotte concludes that “there are some [professions] which I think a gentleman should leave to people who need money to distinguish them” (370); the Highlanders may not hold a prejudice against England as a nation, but Charlotte certainly reveals a class bias. In thus privileging the Highland way of life as constituting an ideal community, Brunton reasserts qualifications of birth over wealth, and even if she rewrites the Highland aristocracy meritocratically, this prejudice betrays a reactionary retreat to

archaic social forms. And such an old-fashioned mode of life, in turn, depends on isolation from the tainted, commercial world beyond; in this “Eden” (372) the Highlanders live in “such repose, such blest seclusion” (372) that Ellen, through many years as Henry’s wife, “never left, nor wished to leave, Glen Eredine” (375). Brunton’s utopian community thus demands a romantic retreat from the city to the country, and such a withdrawal evades rather than overcomes the political and social problems Brunton identifies.

More significantly, because this Highland community retains its patriarchal basis, the happiness and well-being of the people of Glen Eredine depend almost entirely on the benevolence of its patriarch. During his absence from his Scotland home—Henry leaves the Highlands for England to avoid testifying against a cattle thief and to accommodate his English mother’s wishes (346)—Henry, like a good future ruler, maintains his ties with his community, helping his people from afar (346), and when Kenneth dies the hero returns to the Highlands to take his place with his father at the head of his clan. On the basis of his letters to Charlotte, Ellen explains that as a caring leader Henry

appeared to be acquainted with the character and situation of an incredible number of his clansmen; and the interest and authority with which he wrote of them seemed little less than patriarchal. Though I must own that his commands were not always consonant to English ideas of liberty, they seemed uniformly dictated by the spirit of disinterested justice and humanity; and Graham, in exercising almost the control of an absolute prince, was guided by the feelings of a father. (338)

While praising Henry’s leadership qualities, this passage betrays the precariousness and arbitrariness of Brunton’s utopian vision of social cohesion. As head of his clan, Henry, not believing in “English ideas of liberty,” maintains “absolute,” dictatorial control over his citizens, an authority which Brunton, through Ellen as narrator, attempts to legitimate by claiming that Henry wields that power with “the feelings of a father.” But the benevolence of Henry’s paternal feelings is a function of his character and not necessarily of the position; with a different, perhaps not so sympathetic, man as master of the clan, Glen Eredine could be a less idealistic community. As a result, an ideological

tension arises in the narrative. As already demonstrated, Brunton takes great pains to establish a sense of equality among the citizens of Glen Eredine, a perception of the community as a web in which the people are interconnected through friendship and affection with little or no sense of division. But the patriarchal basis of this society is hierarchy, and hence division, thereby undermining Brunton's efforts at egalitarianism. A paternalistic conception of communal relations necessitates the infantilization of the subordinate social members; indeed, the "veneration and love" felt by the Highlanders for their Chieftain is expressly "filial" (352). Thus, the "children" in this social dialect, the clan members, are vulnerable and essentially powerless, dependent upon the good will of their patriarch for the terms of their existence, so that their hold on communal felicity is tenuous at best.

The point is that Brunton attempts to ground her ideal community on an unworkable tension, attempting to render compatible the counter movements of egalitarianism and paternalism through a reactionary appeal to Burke's benevolent patriarch. The limitation, of course, is not entirely Brunton's. Sarah Smith explains that Scottish Calvinism is an "essentially egalitarian" faith which relies upon "a patriarchal and marital orientation" (43). Brunton's text, therefore, as a clear consequence of the author's religious sensibility, can be seen to expose the contradiction at the centre of Calvinist theology. Nevertheless, this paternalistic sensibility, as a function of Brunton's religious as well as nationalistic bias, qualifies the radical gender reconstructions and feminist proposals asserted in the narrative.

While this firm assertion of patriarchy in the Scottish Highlands may undermine any sense of equality across ranks among the clan members, at least within the immediate Graham family (those living in Castle Eredine) a certain egalitarianism seems to exist. Caroline Gonda suggests that *Discipline* concentrates on relationships between women rather than those involving both sexes (202), and one such influential female friendship concerns Ellen and Charlotte. The noble daughter



of the Highland Chieftain befriends the previously impoverished daughter of mercantile money with a bond that “will outlast [their] lives” (333). Each so different, the two women teach one another in “a lasting bond of union” (337-38), Charlotte “constantly” seeking “to impress [Ellen] with feelings of equality and sisterhood” (349). As females of differing ranks, these two women and their sense of friendship seem to transgress class boundaries. Katherine Sobba Green goes one step further in her interpretation of the Graham family to suggest that relationships within the Castle disrupt distinctions based on sex as well. Ellen describes Charlotte as a woman with “the unsubdued majesty of one who had never felt the presence of a superior” (329), determining that in his letters to his sister Henry addresses Charlotte “as a friend, as an equal” (338). The heroine also claims that she, Henry, and Charlotte all superintend the large Graham plantation “together” (371). Based on such evidence, Katherine Sobba Green concludes that Castle Eredine is a haven of sexual equality.

Green contends that

Brunton’s description of Henry implies in the Scottish household a kind of haven where individuated women share equitably in the family circle, where the relationship between man and woman is companionate rather than hierarchical, one conducive to moral constancy.

If Henry is necessarily a kind of authority figure in relation to his clan, he is not so in regard to his sister and to Ellen. Hence, while Brunton acknowledges a place for patriarchy, she relegates it altogether to the exterior world. (133)

Green proposes that because Henry is a patient, kind, virtuous man, Ellen and Charlotte enjoy equality with their Chieftain within the insular walls of the Castle, so that Ellen’s marriage is “companionate” rather than “hierarchical.”

However, such an analysis does not take into account the significance of paternalism as a determining factor in the narrative. I suggest that the figure of the benevolent father determines not only class relations, but also and especially sexual ones; all the relationships in the novel fall under the aegis of the worldly father as representative of God the Father. Through Miss Mortimer, Brunton defines spirituality as a specifically filial obligation and submission to God. As the good daughter,

in her hours of devotion Miss Mortimer sings a hymn of “filial gratitude” (179), enduring the pain she suffers on her deathbed “not with the iron contumacy of a savage, but with the submission of filial love” (207). The earthly translation of this spiritual relationship consists of the child’s obedient submission to the parent, in particular the father, and Ellen clearly errs when she defies paternal demands. Although Ellen loves her father, “the proper foundation of filial duty, of all duty, was wanting in [her] mind” (151), and she is easily led astray by Lord Frederick and Lady St Edmunds, neither of whom respects paternal authority, agreeing to elope with the unprincipled Lord against Mr Percy’s express orders (157). Brunton offers Cecil Graham as a corrective in such matters of filial obedience; the romanticized woman sacrifices her love for Robert in order to wed James according to her father’s dictate (264). Although Katherine Sobba Green is correct to assert that Brunton “draws in full the extremity of the young woman’s pain” (132), Brunton also applauds Cecil’s attention to duty, her example causing Ellen to lament her “ill-fated rebellion” (264).<sup>10</sup> Virtue demands that one heed the father as well as the Father.

A significant part of Ellen’s re-education, then, concerns the art of filial submission. In the opening sequence of the novel just prior to her death, Ellen’s mother asks God to “be kinder than [Ellen’s] earthly parents, and show thyself a father, though it be in chastising” (9). Through her subsequent sufferings Ellen does indeed learn to accept “with filial thankfulness the chastisement of a father” (210). More significantly, she also learns to submit to her earthly father in the guise of Henry Graham. Gonda argues that with Mr Percy’s death, “paternal power is spectacularly ‘blown to the devil’” (175), that Ellen’s story tells the tale not of “the tyrannical exercise of paternal power but the dangerous results of paternal weakness” (176), since paternal authority is “enfeebled” in the narrative (203). She further claims that Henry as lover-mentor is too distant to exercise more than slight influence over the heroine in her father’s absence (193). I disagree on both counts. Certainly, Mr Percy is a neglectful, inefficient patriarch, but Brunton replaces him with Henry as the “good”

father, the benevolent, effective patriarch, so that paternal authority looms large throughout the novel; in fact, by marrying Henry, Ellen in effect weds her metaphorical father. Henry is, after all, seventeen years Ellen's senior, and Ellen continually seeks his approbation more than his romantic love (e.g. 36, 127, 140, 158). More explicitly, Ellen states that she has "a sort of filial confidence in [Maitland/Henry's] good will" (143), claiming in one of her early fits of vanity, "I should as soon have dreamt of marrying my father" as Maitland (131). Clearly, Henry is a paternal figure not only to his clan, but also to Ellen, and, in agreeing to marry him, the heroine makes up for defying her first father. Learning of Cecil's marital situation, Ellen declares, "A dutiful daughter deserves to be a happy wife" (265). With Henry Graham, Ellen becomes both.

As this idealized father figure, Henry is unequivocally and excessively masculine. From his situation as Indian merchant, to anti-slavery activist, to Highland Chieftain, Henry is the epitome of manliness. Before Ellen encounters the hero in his Highland home, she imagines Henry to be like his sister Charlotte, "with all the vivacity and intelligence of her countenance, strengthened into masculine spirit and sagacity," and Ellen's assumptions prove correct (332). A liberally educated Scotsman well-versed in classical accomplishments as well as professional and commercial enterprises (195-97), Henry commands "manly sense" and "hardy virtues" (145) with "the powers of his manly mind" (117). With the "manly port, the primitive hardihood" (251), the strong intellect and body of a "hardy mountaineer" (195), Brunton's hero boasts the "penetration" indicative of a spiritually enlightened soul (196), yet his religious sensibility in no way feminizes him. In fact, Henry "scorn[s]" effeminacy (247), as does Brunton; any sense of the feminine in a male character is completely rejected in the novel. Lord Frederick, for example, the mercenary libertine and man of fashion, is negatively associated with Lady St Edmunds's "temple of effeminacy" (145), her sensuous, opulently decorated boudoir which Katherine Sobba Green suggests "echoes the contemporary misogynist association between inordinate sensuality and the female" (128),

specifically the courtly female. Then there is Mr Boswell, the pitiful, timid, shrew-beaten husband who is slave to his abusive wife. Even Mr Sidney, “a man of sense” (198), cannot live up to the standard of manliness set by Henry Graham, Ellen deciding that the good doctor lacks “a certain masculine dignity of character” (193) in comparison with the novel’s worthy hero. Throughout the narrative Brunton clearly privileges the masculine in its most exaggerated form as indicative of the idealized male character.

In marrying Henry Graham, therefore, the lover-mentor who functions as a paternal figure as well as a fully masculinized hero, Ellen clearly submits to the powerful and dazzling forces of patriarchy. Early in the novel, Henry as Maitland may tell Ellen that a wife must be a “friend,” a “fellow-labourer,” and a “fellow-worshipper” rather than an “inferior” (140), but his union to Ellen does not fulfil the promise of the companionate marriage asserted by Katherine Sobba Green (133). On the contrary, Henry evolves from Ellen’s implicit mentor to her overt teacher, his conversation serving as “a source of instruction, as well as of amusement” to all (371). Like Miss Mortimer, Henry may teach without the “dogma and harangue, which is so apt to infect those who chiefly converse with inferiors” (371), but he nonetheless infantilizes his wife; “his sound mind and steady principle” serve as “a support for her acknowledged weakness” (374), his wise counsel “checking her wanderings” (375). Ellen may thus claim to superintend the Graham land with Henry and Charlotte, but the list of duties undertaken by the two women confirms the sexual division and hierarchy of labor in Castle Eredine. Ellen and Charlotte serve as “schoolmistresses, chamber-council, physicians, apothecaries, and listeners-general” but only to the “female inhabitants of Glen Eredine” (371); for the most part, the women remain in the Castle while the men tend to the world beyond (371). Indeed, Ellen’s concluding definition of her role is not as an employed woman in the public domain or a resistant feminist, but, in an overt gesture of complicity with domestic ideology, as “mother of [the clan’s] future chieftain” (375). Despite Brunton’s persuasive and far-reaching

attempts to construct alternative situations for the female sex which provide for increased agency, the women of Glen Eredine remain subordinated.

This conservative recourse to patriarchy that reaches its climax in the Highland section of the narrative thus qualifies the radical current of Brunton's reconstructive efforts; however, it does not negate those attempts at reconfiguration. By resisting and rewriting customary educational practices and gender representations as a means of expanding female experience and independence, Brunton succeeds in envisioning a significant degree of feminist disruption, significant at least within the confines of Brunton's particular context; considering the delimiting strictures of Brunton's religious sensitivity and her romantic nationalism, *Discipline's* reformist proposals are, indeed, highly subversive.

But beyond the immediate qualifications Brunton's paternalism poses for her specific narrative, I find most significant the broader implications of the epistemological ideology, the specific relation between rationality and religion, which supports *Discipline's* logic. As discussed earlier, Brunton's arguments in favor of educational reform, of granting women access to a masculine, rational pedagogy, echo those of other women writers, but her rationale for those changes is more distinctive. Rather than promoting pedagogical reform as a matter of women's rights, as in, for example, Fenwick's or Hays's novels, Brunton—and More gestures to the same logic—demands educational improvements as primarily a matter of religious necessity. Brunton clearly valorizes rationality, but not for its own sake or for the sake, at least predominantly, of a woman's worldly existence; although Brunton does suggest that a more substantial education could help women support themselves economically, she promotes reason first and foremost in the service of spirituality. During Ellen's conversion and re-education, Miss Mortimer informs her young charge that the reasoned, disciplined study of substantive discourse can lead to the "rational assent to the truth" (189), specifically Christian truth. Reason thus functions to persuade the individual to faith,

“to fix [religion] in your mind, and endear it to your affections” (190); indeed, Ellen comes to her conversion through a slow, rational process. However, rationality, while potentially helpful, is not necessary for such spiritual awakening. Miss Mortimer claims to know people of “pure” and “efficient” piety “who had no leisure, and perhaps no capacity for reasoning themselves into a conviction of the historical truth of Christianity” (190). What is more, reason is not enough to lead even the intelligent individual to faith. Miss Mortimer reminds Ellen “that mere rational assent fell far short of that faith to which such mighty effects are ascribed. The direct means of obtaining a gift, she said, was to ask it; and faith she considered as a gift” (189). Reason may thus prove useful, as it does for Ellen, in one’s religious quest, but it is neither necessary nor sufficient to the establishment of faith.

Therefore, Brunton may draw a connection between reason and religion, representing both categories through the metaphors of penetration and light, but there is a clear hierarchy at work in her narrative. True spiritual sensitivity is always beyond the reach of rationality; to Brunton, in an assessment entirely unlike that of Wollstonecraft, reason is not God. Although “Reason must convince the understanding,” Ellen asserts that “a power which neither human reasoning nor human eloquence can boast must bend the will to goodness” (200). In a manner somewhat akin to Hannah More, Brunton does hint that this “power” is connected to intuition as a heightened cognitive capacity; when Miss Mortimer dies, Ellen suggests that the pious woman is called to “the intuitive knowledge . . . of her Father’s house” (207). However, such an assertion is not explored in enough detail to be considered a significant concern in the text. But the point remains that the highest faculty in Brunton’s narrative, spirituality, transcends rationality. Indeed, Ellen discovers during her nightmarish stay in an Edinburgh asylum that reason, while equally accessible to every human being, is painfully fragile, so that “the true glory of man consists . . . in that capacity of knowing, loving, and serving God,” that is, in one’s spirituality (291). As a result of this privileging of faith over

reason, rationality is effectively subsumed in religiosity; in her resistance to educational norms, Brunton may valorize reason, but she also subordinates it to spirituality.

As a result of this shifting emphasis, this transition in the rationale supporting women's educational reforms from a matter of human and civic rights to a specifically religious necessity, Brunton, along with More before her and a host of writers to follow, helps construct one pathway leading to the kinds of sexual repression and mutual exclusivity of gender representations that help constitute Victorian ideology. Catherine Hall suggests that the early nineteenth-century Evangelical movement, with its emphasis on home and family and on woman as spiritual centre of both, helped create the restrictive domestic and bourgeois ideology that came to define Victorian Britain (82-90). In Brunton's case, the religious writer may support women's worldly independence, yet she simultaneously and rather ironically constructs women as spiritual, hence other-worldly, creatures in anticipation of Victorian definitions of womanhood. Ellen's mother, who appears perfectly pious except for her indulgence of her daughter, is an "angel" (27, 81), "one of the finer order of spirits" (6); even the reformed Ellen is referred to as an "angel" by both Mr Sidney (188) and Henry Murray (230). Much more overtly, Miss Mortimer is an actual "saint" (209) who tells Ellen, when the younger woman insists on debating minor doctrines with Mr Sidney, that she would be better to "disapprove without disputing; and I think it is not obscurely hinted by the highest authority, that the modest example of a Christian woman is likely to be more convincing than her arguments" (191). Although a spinster who, by definition, resists matrimonial and maternal expectations, Miss Mortimer advises Ellen as a woman to influence men by silent example rather than rational discourse, a form of counsel which reaches forward to mid-century reactionary prescriptions of femininity. Brunton may attempt to construct women as useful, independent, social beings active in the public world, but because of her religious sensitivity, her privileging of faith over rationality, she also constructs women as heavenly, spiritual beings, a representation which lends itself to what

would become the Victorian division of the feminine, spiritual realm from the masculinized, social world.

Brunton's novel, therefore, is defined by conflictual impulses which demonstrate the difficulty early nineteenth-century women writers faced in attempting to negotiate sexual and gender politics. On the one hand, Brunton's religious and patriarchal bias anticipates chauvinistic Victorian strictures, demonstrating how efforts to liberate women through public agency and independence can be manipulated over time to legitimize further repression, how subaltern reformist attempts can be co-opted by and turned to the service of the male, bourgeois status quo. On the other hand, Brunton's insistence on specific educational reforms, an argument which echoes those of more overtly radical writers, and her disruptive reconsiderations of customary gender and sex roles also help create a path for the evolution of Victorian feminism and resistance. Ann Jones's analysis may imply (via Kathleen Tillotson) that Brunton, like Austen, anticipates Victorian realism (87-89); I suggest that the Scottish writer also anticipates Victorian gender politics, both conservative and radical.



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Although Ina Ferris suggests that Owenson was and is “better known by her married name” (45), Lady Morgan, I refer to the nineteenth-century writer by her maiden name because she published *Ida* when still a single woman, the title page identifying the author as “Miss Owenson.” The novelist married Sir Charles Morgan in 1812, three years after *Ida* was released.

<sup>2</sup> Charles Morgan was the Abercorns’s private physician when he met and fell in love with Owenson. Because they were so taken with the young writer and wished Owenson to remain in their circle, the Abercorns knighted Morgan as an added inducement to marriage (Moskal 172). In proof of her liberal and feminist resistance, it appears that Owenson, although over thirty, was somewhat reluctant to wed, fearing an end to her literary career and independent life, but because Charles proved supportive of her writing, ending his medical work to go on tours with his wife and help her research (since she could make more money than he could), Owenson’s career continued to blossom after her marriage (Spender, *Mothers* 305-07).

<sup>3</sup> There is some slight discrepancy as to the actual date upon which this literary pension was granted. Dale Spender (*Mothers* 312) and Richard Sha (200), who relies on Spender as his source in this instance, cite 1834 as the date of the award, but Gary Kelly (*English Fiction* 311), Jeanne Moskal (172), Ann Jones (220), Ina Ferris (46), and Mary Campbell (*Lady Morgan* 216) all place the award as dating from 1837, Campbell identifying May as the month in which the Prime Minister, Lord Melbourne, made the offer. This latter date seems more likely since Owenson’s most recent biographer, Campbell, as well as Ann Jones prove particularly reliable in their discussions of Owenson’s life and career.

<sup>4</sup> This scandalous review by Croker stems from a long-running rancour between the two authors. Mary Campbell explains that in 1804 Croker attacked the Irish theatre in his *Epistle on the Present State of the Irish Stage*, and when Owenson responded in pamphlet form with a castigation of Croker and a defence of the theatrical world which she signed “SO,” everyone immediately identified the female writer as the pamphleteer, and Owenson “gained [Croker’s] implacable enmity for the rest of her life” (*Lady Morgan* 56). When Tory supporters launched a new periodical, the *Quarterly Review*, which was intended, according to Mary Campbell, “to maintain Tory principles by ruthlessly attacking anyone who wrote with other political affiliations,” Owenson’s *Ida* received the dubious distinction of being “the very first victim of this new policy of literary terrorism” by Croker and the periodical’s editor, Gifford (Campbell, *Lady Morgan* 96).

<sup>5</sup> I am indebted here to Moira Gatens for her astute analysis of Rousseau and Wollstonecraft.

<sup>6</sup> Not insignificantly, Richard Sha suggests that besides renegotiating the relationship of politics and patriotism, Owenson also rewrites the category of history in her *Patriotic Sketches of Ireland*, using sensibility to render history more accountable to individual experience and emotional intensity (194-95). He argues that Owenson (as well as Helen Maria Williams) defines feminine sensibility as an essential part of historical truthfulness (202-03), that she appeals to women’s sensibility in order to remind her female audience of their potentially active role in history, of their responsibility to stimulate others beyond indifference (204-05). Owenson thus constructs feminine sensibility “despite its problems” as “a historically necessary remedy” to political and cultural violence (195).

<sup>7</sup> See Ann Jones, *Ideas and Innovations in Jane Austen's Age*, for a detailed discussion of the literary relationship of Brunton and Austen (79-113). Jones suggests that Austen, whose letters clearly indicate her familiarity with Brunton's works, "is now credited with an innovation which is not entirely her own," that innovation being the development of psychological realism in the novel (79). Jones argues that the emphasis placed on self-examination by the Evangelicals "led to the development of the portrayal of internal conflict" (79), and Brunton, as an Evangelical, was attempting such psychological characterization before Austen was published (80). In comparing Brunton's *Self-Control* to Austen's *Mansfield Park* and *Discipline* to *Emma*, Jones consistently privileges Austen's artistry, criticizing Brunton's melodramatic tendencies (94) and overt moralizing (83), but Jones concludes that "despite Mary Brunton's weakness as a novelist, her effort, at a time when this was relatively new, to produce complex psychological characterization, commands respect" (107).

<sup>8</sup> Like Sydney Owenson, who reacted against English ignorance of Irish life, Brunton recognized the lack of English knowledge of the Scottish people and country, acknowledging this unfamiliarity in a note to *Self-Control* (A. Jones 107). Greatly appreciating Maria Edgeworth's Irish tales, Brunton thus attempted her own Scottish tale in the final episode of *Discipline*, constructing a detailed portrayal of the Highland people and scenery (A. Jones 107). Brunton's desire for an authentic representation of Scottish life and manners is confirmed by her research trips to the Highlands (S. Smith 42) as well as the many footnotes (also like Owenson) in the final section of the novel which attempt to explain various Scottish customs and manners; one footnote in particular firmly asserts that the Highland scenes "are all borrowed from fact" (362). However, because *Waverley* was published when Brunton was almost finished her novel and because Brunton felt Scott's portrayals of the Highlands were much better than hers, Brunton "felt she must excise her Highland sequence" (A. Jones 108). But her husband persuaded her to continue, suggesting that Scott's success could influence public taste and thereby increase Brunton's own popularity (A. Jones 108). Despite Brunton's apprehensions that her Highland sequence might compare unfavorably with Scott's regional depictions, both Ann Jones (108) and Sarah Smith (42) applaud the originality of the female author's Highland episode. For a comparison of Scott and Brunton which points to the uniqueness of Brunton's women-centred representation of the Scottish Highlands, see Sarah Smith (54).

<sup>9</sup> Without intending to suggest that Brunton was influenced by Owenson, I find it interesting that at this masquerade ball Ellen dresses in Turkish disguise as the "fair Fatima" (82), and Lord Frederick, in his pursuit of the heroine, presents himself as the Turkish "Grand Signior" (89). Later, when Ellen decides to try to trick Maitland into admitting his love for her, she says, "I'll make him as jealous as a very Osmyn" (132). Although I find no biographical or historical evidence to confirm that Brunton was aware of Owenson's work, this last reference suggests a familiarity with the story of *Ida*, and Brunton's interest in Maria Edgeworth's nationalistic novels begs the question whether Owenson's similar (and famous) works of Irish patriotism caught Brunton's attention.

<sup>10</sup> As another example of proper attention to filial obligation, Henry, as a good son, submits to his mother's wishes that he go to England (369), and he "never regret[s] having obeyed a parent" (347). Mostly, however, parental authority in the novel resides in the hands of the father.

## Conclusion

Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove any thing.

Jane Austen, *Persuasion* (1818)

In 1815-1816 Jane Austen wrote her last completed novel, *Persuasion*, a work of domestic fiction which was to reach publication two years later, after Austen's death. In the climactic moments of this novel the hero, Captain Wentworth, overhears a discussion between the heroine, Anne Elliot, and Captain Harville, a conversation which finally confirms for the uncertain Wentworth Anne's constancy, thereby fulfilling the conditions necessary to the central couple's happy union. During this conversation Anne utters the above comment, and in this brief gesture to writing and pedagogy Anne Elliot, and Jane Austen through her, gives voice to the frustration, the resistance, the defiance of over a century of intellectual women. Anne identifies the crucial role of books and education in representation and self-representation, forcefully asserting that those who command education control "the pen," the influential means through which knowledge, value, and social and political reality are constructed and disseminated. For Captain Harville's edification, Anne also emphasizes women's exclusion from this epistemological and cultural process. It is to this situation, women as silenced, women as subaltern, women as under-educated and unrepresented, that the female writers in my study respond through their fiction. Fenwick, Hays, Opie, More, Owenson,

and Brunton all take up the pen in an attempt to effect cultural change, to reform educational practices and gender constructions as a means of increasing women's agency, of expanding their personal and social existence.

That these women writers turned to education with such intensity and seriousness speaks to the prevalence of early nineteenth-century Britain's concern with pedagogical practice, especially with women's education. But in these particular novels, most striking is the similarity of the specific educational reforms these disparate writers propose. Education functions as an ideological apparatus which helps them refigure gender and ratify identity in their various discourses on education. Of course, this is not to suggest that all six writers articulate a homogeneous response to the pedagogical, political, and social polemics of their era, such as the works of Rousseau and Godwin, or that their works bespeak a servile discipleship to Mary Wollstonecraft. On the contrary, my analysis suggests that these writers were accomplished readers of the polemics and politics of their period, their responses to the cultural text of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Britain diverging in a variety of directions. But in creatively appropriating turn-of-the-century intellectual and philosophical debates, these now obscure women novelists offer an alternative history, and part of that history is a powerful demand to transform educational practices and gender formations in particular ways.

Fenwick and Hays align themselves rather easily but still critically with the radicalism of Wollstonecraft and the Godwin circle, and Owenson exudes the radical fervor of Irish nationalism, but Opie is much more cautious in her response to the revolutionary era, and the Scottish Brunton's religiosity at times pulls her in the reactionary direction of the often highly conservative More. Yet regardless of their differences in politics, class, nationality, or religion, these women novelists all attempt to transform female pedagogical practices and dominant gender constructions through an appeal to balance and reconciliation. Like many of their contemporaries, these women reject the

traditional feminine education in the merely decorative accomplishments, but their discourse goes further to construct a comprehensive alternative mode of instruction and gender representation for the early nineteenth-century woman. Albeit for varying reasons, these women writers all seek to gain access for women to masculine education in form and content, those educational practices customarily reserved for the male sex, while simultaneously revaluing or rewriting feminine pedagogy. This effort to reconcile the masculine to the feminine in both educational practice and gender construction reaches its most overt expression in Sydney Owenson's intriguing novel. Individually and collectively, these works articulate a specific and genuine demand for palpable, effective, lasting change.

For these diverse women novelists, moreover, this alternative gender construct envisioned through educational reformation translates into expanded female agency and socio-political significance of varying degrees and kinds. Owenson brings women to the battlefield while Hays constructs them as legitimately passionate beings and Fenwick presents them as agents of worldly reformation and salvation. Even Brunton, with her reactionary privileging of patriarchy, asserts the necessity of women's financial independence through employment, and More's insistence on female dependence does not prevent the religious writer from granting women power and activity through social charity. Elizabeth Langland claims that middle-class Victorian women were not as passive and idle as recent analyses have tended to suggest, that these women in fact played significant roles in the bourgeois economy. I suggest that at the beginning of the century these women writers demonstrate an earlier call, despite the presence and influence of domestic ideology, for greater female independence and opportunity.

Not insignificantly, these novels also demonstrate a concern reaching beyond the self and the female sex to the community as a whole. The beginning of the nineteenth century witnessed an intense period of nation-building in Britain, a time of consolidation in the face of revolutionary

instability, and these novels clearly participate in this process of and concern with cultural cohesion. In their influential discussion of gender and genre in the early nineteenth century, Irene Tayler and Gina Luria suggest that “women of the Romantic period—closed off by personal and social circumstances from the high art of poetic genius—created a countermovement that drew on the growing concern for individual experience (inner and outer), yet focused it on the facts of shared daily life, insisted on the forces of social context” (120-21). As the male Romantic poets’ concern with individual experience increasingly led to isolation and egotism, the women novelists turned their interest in the (female) individual to explorations of that subject within her social context, within her community. Indeed, the six novels in my study confirm such analysis of the communal interests and social temper of early nineteenth-century female fiction. In their efforts to effect educational and gender reforms, the six women writers increasingly challenge dominant notions of rationality and cognitive faculties, the whole-hearted acceptance of customary definitions and valuations of reason by Fenwick (via Wollstonecraft) quickly developing into the suspicion of Hays and Opie and into the reconfigurations of More, Owenson, and Brunton. These discerning disruptions of customary notions of rationality reveal a concern with abstraction and specificity, with the relation of the part to the whole, which speaks directly to the issue of community, to the relation of the individual to society. As the political climate in Britain grows more conservative, the interest in social change demonstrated in the works of Fenwick, Hays, and Opie becomes a concern for social cohesion in More’s novel and especially in the nationalistic works of Owenson and Brunton, but one common denominator among all of these novels is the attention to communal benefits as well as individual happiness. Through their discourse on education these women novelists not only reconstruct gender formations as a means of granting women alternative situations, but they also, in their diverse ways, rewrite the notion of community and the individual’s place in it.

However, while the subversive voices of these writers enjoy significant scope and potency

in their efforts at disruption, their reformist attempts are not uncompromised. As I suggested at the beginning of my study, these women write from the position of the subaltern, the disenfranchised, the marginal, so that the possible efficacy of their revisionary attempts must be measured against the social and political forces and conditions that demand their suppression or appropriation. Informed and influenced by the historical and cultural conditions of turn-of-the-century Britain, these novels share at least two limitations which prove troublesome for the individual narratives as well as for nineteenth-century feminism. One consistent impediment to lasting, effective gender reform in these novels is a lack of, or at least a limited, concern with reconstructing gender through education for the turn-of-the-century male. In several of the novels—Fenwick's, Hays's, and More's works in particular—the authors, although their reformist efforts are directed primarily at women, make tangential attempts to critique customary male gender constructs and gesture to reconstruction, but these efforts remain unrealized, as in *Secresy* and *Emma Courtney*, or ineffectual, as in *Coelebs*. For the most part, the novels tend to turn full circle in their responses to dominant notions of masculinity, beginning with Wollstonecraft's exaggerated valuation of the masculine, moving through the hesitation of Fenwick, More, and especially Hays back to the demand for highly masculinized males in Owenson and Brunton. None of the novels makes any detailed effort to reconstruct gender for men in a manner comparable to that proposed for women. In a binary system predicated on the opposition of two sexes, the resulting attempt to alter only the disenfranchised element of the sexual dichotomy threatens to undermine feminist efforts to effect lasting change for women. For example, Opie discovers, like Wollstonecraft, that transforming women only rather than both sexes necessitates a romantic withdrawal from society, so that the attempt at constructing an alternative community proves unsustainable. Neglecting either sex invites exclusion and isolation rather than communion.

More significantly, the shift in emphasis in the rationale for educational and gender reform from a matter of rights to one of religion proves most troublesome for nineteenth-century feminism

and ideologies of womanhood, as I discuss at length in the section on Mary Brunton. Although the disruptive tenor of these novels confirms the authors' resistance to historical and cultural norms in their perception of education and gender, the rationale supporting each novelist's reformist efforts tends to coincide increasingly with the growing conservatism of early nineteenth-century Britain; in the revolutionary decade Hays and Fenwick exploit the radical discourse of equality and natural right in their feminist arguments, but during the reactionary backlash of the early 1800s More and Brunton turn to a more acceptable, if still somewhat revisionary because Evangelical, morality as the basis of their demands for change. It is this transformation in the underlying logic of these authors' reformist efforts that gradually lends itself to appropriation by the dominant order. Writers like Mary Poovey and Catherine Hall demonstrate how early nineteenth-century domestic ideology becomes transmuted into restrictive representations of Victorian womanhood, and some of the initial moments of this transformation can be glimpsed in the novels here. From Fenwick to Brunton, these women struggle with the limitations of domestic ideology in order to grant value and agency to women, yet by mid-century such efforts at reconstructing the feminine are co-opted by the dominant order, appropriated in service of the patriarchal status quo, and translated into a form that leads to female repression and restriction rather than freedom and activity. The evolution in these writers' feminist logic from rights to religion allows rationality to become slowly subsumed by morality, a transition which contributes to the birth of idealized images of woman as non-worldly, spiritual being, as the Victorian "angel." Ironically, such moralized representations demand the segregation of the masculine and the feminine, rather than the reconciliation sought by these early nineteenth-century reformers.

Nevertheless, despite such circumscription and appropriation these women writers succeed in helping to cultivate the "spirit of cleavage," in sowing the seeds of female resistance and defiance which would come to fruition over the next two centuries. Within the limits of their cultural and



historical situation, Fenwick, Hays, Opie, More, Owenson, and Brunton, along with many other women writers of the time, bring critical attention to the need for change in women's education. They assert women's intellectual abilities and confirm a tradition of female resistance and capacity. Through their discourse on education these women create a fissure, an opening, a space in the cultural fabric that remains to disrupt dominant prescriptions throughout the nineteenth century, both directly—the kinds of pedagogical reforms these women seek are gradually realized, women even gaining entrance into universities by the end of the century—and diffusely in the form of Victorian feminism. Lynne Agress suggests that “as women became more knowledgeable, it was inevitable that they would also become dissatisfied with their boring, unproductive lives” (39). Indeed, as more women became better educated, feminist activity swelled and expanded in a variety of directions which eventually, if slowly, began to gain freedoms and responsibilities for the nineteenth-century woman. Defining her feminist project in *Uneven Developments*, Mary Poovey contends that “any challenge is important because it is an intervention—an intervention that may well disrupt processes already underway and that certainly will become part of the cultural context by which new meanings are produced” (23). By choosing education as their point of intervention, these six women writers adopt the position of the intellectual, a primary site of opposition that helps clear a space from which to gain the perspective, resistance, and mobility necessary to begin to envision and effect lasting, far-reaching cultural change.

Judith Newton Lowder suggests that we need to study women in the past to “help deliver us from ideological illusion” (xix). Certainly, a fuller understanding of these early nineteenth-century novels can aid in such a process of cultural demystification, since contemporary, middle-class, ideological constructions of womanhood as well as current notions of literacy and education which “we now take for granted” (Richardson 272) can trace some of their primary influences to this earlier period of instability and transition. Reclaiming these neglected texts can also help shed light

on issues of canonicity, on the values implicit in historical and recent configurations of what determines or qualifies acceptable literature. I began this chapter by citing a passage from Jane Austen. That the works of Fenwick, Hays, Opie, More, Owenson, and Brunton were applauded in their own time, yet only Jane Austen, who did not usually experience similar popular approval during this period, has historically enjoyed acceptance into literary circles speaks to history's and to our own critical limitations and presumptions of literary value. Critical explorations of these neglected works, therefore, can reveal as much about twentieth- as nineteenth-century ideology, politics, and culture.

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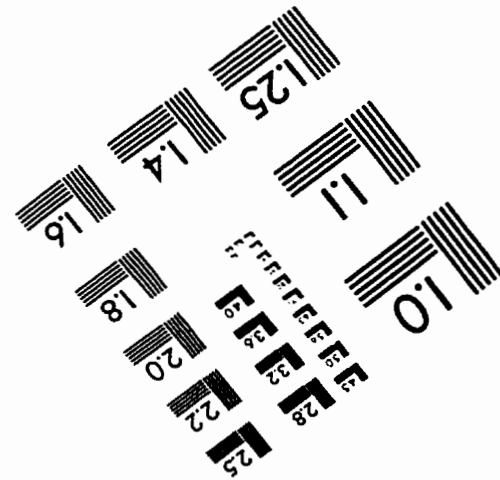
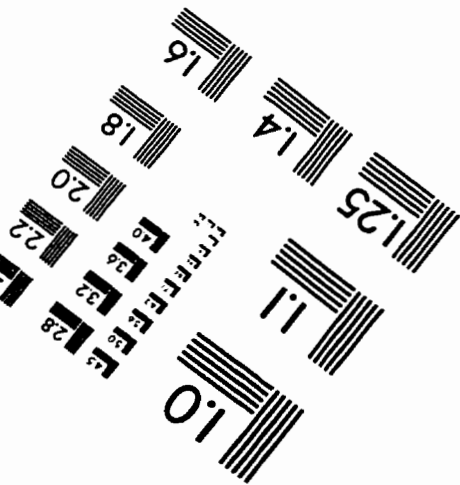
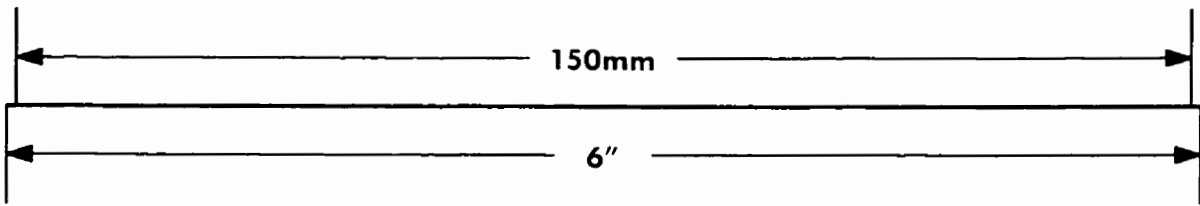
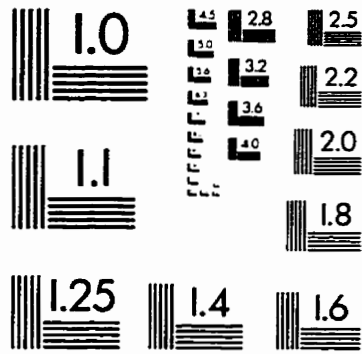
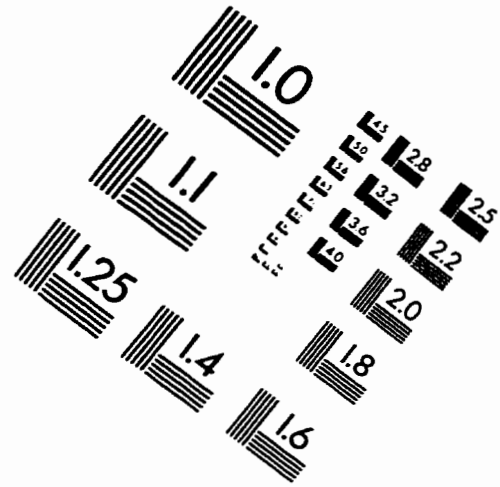
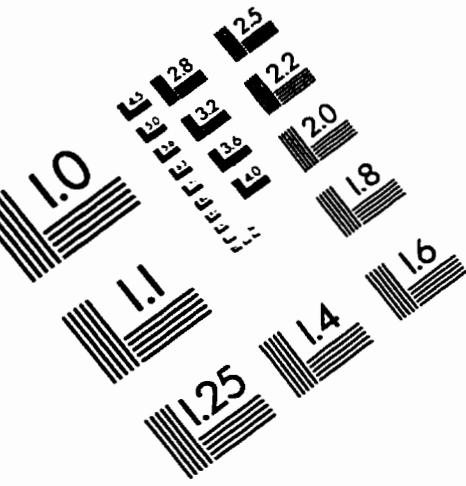
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