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ROMANTIC REVOLUTIONARIES

ROMANTIC REVOLUTIONARIES:

WOMEN NOVELISTS OF THE 1790S

By

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Abstract

In selecting to work on the novels of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, Helen Maria Williams, Elizabeth Inchbald and Charlotte Smith, I deliberately chose five women writers who were radicals of the 1790s in their own ways. By means of their fictional productions, these thinkers challenged the existing social order as well as subverted literary conventions. All five saw the need for change in society; they became the advocates for reform, stressing, in particular, the requirement for amelioration of the woman's condition.

My thesis points out exactly to which aspects of the patriarchal establishment these authors objected. The most important concerns were the inadequacy of the education system for girls, the inequality inherent in the institution of marriage, and the lack of freedom of the adult woman. Though their novels treated these problems in different ways, ranging from implicit questioning to open rebellion, these authors stand apart from other women writers of the period, such as Hannah More and Jane West, who took for granted the justification of the male-dominated social arrangement. They reject the marital and social economy that prescribes sex, procreation and female subservience.

My study shows that while their fictional works seem to be couched in the language of love and sensibility, the women nevertheless revise and deconstruct the essentially male-structured traditional novel. They resist the realist

novel's desire for closure, unity and tautology by opting for a more open-ended, multivalent and decentered construction. In addition, the focus of the fiction is shifted from traditionally "male" preoccupations such as London adventures, conquest, duels, debaucheries and rakishness, to more "female" oriented concerns such as domestic life, maternal responsibility, familial relations and pedagogy.

Most significantly, my dissertation argues that these works articulated the female consciousness, perhaps for the first time in novel form. In these books written, for the most part, from the perspective of a female protagonist, woman is treated as subject, rather than object of the male cognizance. By allowing the female voice to enter into male discourse, these fictions undermine the phallogentric monopoly of power and control of language. Consequently, the transparency of the meaning of words such as virtue, chastity, happiness, love is questioned. These crucial words acquire new signification, embodying specifically female vision and desire.

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INTRODUCTION

i. The Novel: After Smollett and Before Austen

In the history of the novel the end of the eighteenth century, that is, the period between Tobias Smollett and Jane Austen, has sometimes been thought of as "dull." ¹ Unlike the Restoration and the early part of the century, the last third has attracted relatively few academic studies. J.M.S. Tompkins, whose pioneering work, The Popular Novel in England 1770 to 1800 (1932), still stands as the most comprehensive study of the period, has pointed out how the novel flourished as a popular "form of entertainment," though it was inferior as a form of art (1). Scholars, such as Edith Birkhead, in The Tale of Terror: A Study of the Gothic Romance (1963), and Eva Figes, in Sex and Subterfuge: Women Novelists to 1850 (1982), have traced the beginnings of the Gothic novel to this era. Gary Kelly, in his close examination of four novelists in The English Jacobin Novel 1780-1805 (1976), has shown how the Jacobin novel was "the product and the expression of a historical moment" (261). More recently, Dale Spender, in Mothers of the Novel: 100 Good Women Writers before Jane Austen (1986), gives a brief survey of the lives and works of

dozens of female writers in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, as her title suggests. In studying five women authors of the last decade of the century, I would like to demonstrate how their fictional productions contributed to the development of the novel, and, in particular, to women's literary history.

The 1790s was a time of much innovation and change. Thinkers of polemically opposed backgrounds wrote their most important pieces in this decade. William Godwin published his Enquiry Concerning Political Justice in 1793 and his novel, Things As They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams, in 1794. William Blake was experimenting with illuminated painting, and in the first part of the 1790s produced his early visionary works such as The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Songs of Experience, and Visions of the Daughters of Albion and America. Edmund Burke passionately attacked the French Revolution and defended the British Constitution in his Reflections on the Revolution in France, which appeared in November 1790, while Thomas Paine defended the liberty and freedom of the individual in his Rights of Man (1791-2). Inflamed with the political fervour of the times, English Jacobin reformers² such as Mary Wollstonecraft, Robert Bage, Thomas Hardy, Thomas Holcroft, Mary Hays and Helen Maria Williams made public their political sympathies. On the other side were the conservative moralists such as Hannah More, Jane West, Elizabeth Hamilton and Maria Edgeworth. Caught between

radicalism and traditionalism, women such as Elizabeth Inchbald, Mary Robinson and Charlotte Smith saw that some change was necessary, yet were unwilling, or unable to commit themselves to the radical Jacobin cause.

The five women novelists who constitute this study--Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Hays, Helen Maria Williams, Elizabeth Inchbald and Charlotte Smith--were never part of a formal literary or social group, but were connected in various ways. Wollstonecraft was admired by her friend Mary Hays, who later introduced her to Godwin.³ As a critic for the Analytical Review, Wollstonecraft was very likely responsible for the reviews of Smith's Emmeline, Williams' Julia, and Inchbald's A Simple Story published in the journal.⁴ Smith, though she did not have any personal contact with the other women, had certainly read Wollstonecraft by 1798, as she cites her in connection with the reform of laws affecting married women.⁵ While Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Williams were staunch English Jacobins, Smith and Inchbald were sceptical about that association. What they did have in common was the spirit of revolution: a belief in social change and the value of writing as a political tool. All these writers were concerned with such issues as the education of children, the role of women in society, and the inequalities of the class system.

Influenced by Locke, Hartley and, to some extent, Joseph Priestley,⁶ these women attempted to illustrate the

philosophy of necessity in their novels. According to Godwin, this philosophy holds that "the characters of men originate in their external circumstances."⁷ The women writers saw the doctrine as a liberating one for their sex. Adapting it to their purposes, they believed that if women's problems were caused by social conditions rather than by internal, biological ones, or, in Godwin's words, if "the actions and dispositions of mankind are the offspring of circumstances and events, and not of any original determination that they bring into the world" (28), then an "active, scientific manipulation of circumstances" could produce "improvement" in women's lives.⁸ With the example of the French Revolution of 1789 in mind, they were convinced that social change was feasible. Just as the French peasants could free themselves of monarchical rule, women could rid themselves of male domination. Stimulated by the ideal of liberty, equality, and fraternity, Mary Wollstonecraft concluded the second chapter of her Vindication of the Rights of Woman by stating: "as sound politics diffuse liberty, mankind, including woman, will become more wise and virtuous" (89). Thus, many of the women writers often borrowed the language of republicanism and revolution to write of their own situations. Husbands and laws were tyrants and despots, while marriage was an institution which imprisoned women. Women argued for their rights, for liberty, and for equal opportunity in education.

Because they saw that reformation was the key to the

betterment of mankind, most of these female writers supported the French Revolution. Mary Wollstonecraft wrote her Vindication of the Rights of Men (1790) in reply to Burke's Reflections on the Revolution in France. Helen Maria Williams' Letters from France (1790) was a genuine, though at times misguided, effort to commend the revolutionary actions of the Girondists in France. Charlotte Smith's novel Desmond (1792) praises the post-revolutionary government of France and makes explicit links between monarchs and despotic husbands. As the Revolution reached its Reign of **T**error, however, these women became easy targets, ridiculed by supporters of the status quo, such as the Reverend Richard Polwhele in The Unsex'd Females (1798), as misguided philosophers and republican radicals.

Prof. Kelly sums up the attitude of the reformers of the 1790s as such: the "English Jacobins...inherited the complex of ideas and values which descended from the eighteenth century empirical tradition, the French and Scottish Enlightenments, and English religious dissent, and which the French Revolution transformed into Romanticism. The essentials of that philosophy were a conviction that experience was the basis of all knowledge, a confidence that environment produced character, a belief that men were innately good and potentially perfectible and a faith that the truth would make them free."⁹ Whether as works which articulate the opinions and beliefs of this particular period, or as fictional productions which verbalize for the

first time the problems inherent in society's gender differentiation, the romantic revolutionary novels provide an important link between the literature of the eighteenth and the nineteenth century. It is time for a study, a reassessment of these pieces, which have for so long been ignored and dismissed as inferior art by traditional literary critics.

ii. Romance and Revolution

The "romantic-revolutionary novelists" of the 1790s blended passion with political theory.¹⁰ In their own different ways, the five women novelists consciously refashioned the novel developed by Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett. While retaining the literary discourse of the genre, they reshaped the structure, and redefined values, offering the female experience as the source and centre of meaning. What these writers offered that male novelists could not was authenticity of experience. They used their works to articulate their ideas and feelings about marriage, sexuality and the problems of gender. In this way, their fiction became a means of questioning and evaluating existing ideologies.

In the introduction to Writing Beyond the Ending: Narrative Strategies of Twentieth-Century Women Writers, Rachel Blau DuPlessis makes the connection between fiction and ideology. She writes, "Narrative in the most general terms is a version of, or a special expression of ideology: representations by which we construct and accept values and institutions. Any fiction expresses ideology, for example, romance plots of various kinds and the fate of female characters express attitudes at least toward family, sexuality and gender" (x). Similarly, Lennard J. Davis, in

Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel, talks about the relation between ideology and novels. He believes that they "share similar cognitive processes"; and that "fiction arose historically from the same discourse as ideology" (219). He argues that "realism" is a function of ideology, and says: the "novel's point of reference is not history,...but the social process of signification, the world of 'lived' as opposed to 'actual' experience" (221). The reality of the novel was "created as a system of signification rather than as a virtual reproduction of material reality" (222).

What all this means in relation to the women writers is that as novels do not reflect actual experience, but a fusion of the real and the imaginary--in Davis' terms--"lived" experience, then novels can either embody or counteract ideology, depending on who writes them. Since authors have traditionally been male, then it is the masculine sense of the "real," the masculine sense of female and femininity rather than actuality that has been portrayed. When women writers have the opportunity of expressing their voice, novels become "tangible forms of highly encoded and profoundly reflexive defences against authority and power" (Davis, 222). The attempt to challenge political, legal and domestic institutions in the 1790s is manifested in the women's endeavor to subvert the conventions of narrative.

This kind of writing is also different from the

circulating library romances of the same period which, as a writer for the Analytical Review of February 1789 puts it, were composed of "unnatural characters, improbable incidents, sad tales of woe".¹¹ The novels by these women writers were written with more serious intentions. They were not produced merely to entertain and excite the sensibility of young ladies, but were created in order to make their readers aware of certain social issues; to give them a realistic portrait of everyday life; and to point out various problems encountered by women both in social and domestic situations. For them, fiction was not just a means of amusement, but also a way of carrying private morality and beliefs into the public realm.

To a greater extent than the writers of the early part of the century, these women novelists, living at the end of the eighteenth century, were more aware of the division between public and private values, between what appears to be and what really is. In The Order of Things, Michel Foucault sees these years, the 1790s, as a period of transition from what he calls the classical to the modern episteme. It was a time when man moves from an order where "language is simply the representation of words" to an era which saw "the emancipation of language" (209). Where classical criticism questioned language in terms of "truth, precision, appropriateness, or expressive value," modern philology questions the transparency of words, of signs and their meaning (80). Thus, in what Foucault calls the

classical order, it was possible for a character in Fielding named Allworthy to represent, as his name suggested, benevolence and good-heartedness. In what Foucault calls the modern order, it was no longer satisfactory to assume a one-to-one relation between words and their meaning.

Raymond Williams shares Foucault's view that it was in the eighteenth century that a distinction was made between language and reality. In Marxism and Literature, Williams argues that this century saw the beginning of a major new emphasis on language as activity, in close relation to the demystified understanding of society as a set of structures and inventions "made" by human beings. As they had been in all previously dominant traditions, "language" and "reality" were no longer systematically perceived as decisively separated.¹² Samia Spencer relates this new emphasis to the rise of feminism:

Within a world of mystically withdrawn "things" and (Platonic) ideas, patriarchy could flourish and priests could manipulate the commandments. But with the merging of words and things in the neutral daylight of the Eighteenth Century, the questions of feminism become possible, the patriarchal repression of words is transparently at issue in the new inquiry into what and how words "mean," what and how they control. (203)

Hence, in their novels, the romantic revolutionary writers questioned what society meant by words such as virtue, duty, chastity and honor--particularly as they applied to women. What was socially acceptable as a standard of behaviour was being examined, scrutinized. Women and men no longer did things because of custom or habit, but questioned the meaning behind the actions, and the arbitrariness of the use of words. What was sanctioned in the public world now had to be acceptable to the individual and his or her beliefs. Personal observation and experience became one of the most important criteria of the revolutionary spirit.

That these women were affected by these changes is manifested in their novels as well as their other writings. Many of these female authors wrote essays and tracts as well as fiction. Both Wollstonecraft's A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) and Mary Hays' An Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women (1798) expressed the importance of treating women as human beings, as individuals rather than decorative dolls. They saw women's role changing from figures who represent masculine ideals--whether of beauty, motherhood, purity, or sexuality--to creatures with their own particular attributes. They saw the necessity of providing education for women. The other writers, Smith, Inchbald and Williams, though they wrote no feminist tracts, raised thought-provoking issues in their novels. They, too, saw

the need to change society, to adapt to a world where values were constantly being subverted and displaced. Some of the favourite topics debated in their fiction included the recent revolution on the Continent, the good and bad effects of war, slavery in the West Indies, the problems of the poor, and the consequences of irresponsible marriages.

Whether they were writers of tracts or not, their novels go beyond thinly disguised polemics: their chosen discourse is integral, not incidental, to their beliefs. The genre of the sentimental romance seemed a perfect mode of expression for these intellectuals. First, it was a genre accessible to women both as readers and as writers. By the end of the eighteenth century, women constituted approximately three-quarters of the novel-reading public.¹³ These women read books written largely by female novel-writers. The Monthly Review of December 1790 remarked: "Of the various species of composition that in course come before us, there are none in which our writers of the male sex have less excelled, since the days of Richardson and Fielding, than in the arrangement of the novel. Ladies seem to appropriate to themselves an exclusive privilege in this kind of writing."¹⁴ Thus, these novelists could air their views and express dissatisfaction with social and political institutions without being singled out, or being accused of "meddling" in masculine discourses. Writing became their act of defiance, their way of speaking out, of rebelling against the passive

role for women prescribed by the patriarchal society. The genre was ideal because it guaranteed an audience that was, if not sympathetic, at least, mostly female.

Secondly, unlike Augustan reflective poetry which required a background of classical learning and literature, or Restoration Drama which needed a working knowledge of theatre and stage production, the sentimental novel could be written without ever leaving the home. More often than not, it had a female protagonist, and it centered on domestic concerns and affairs of the heart. Even people who disapproved of the genre agreed that women were "naturally" suited to this type of writing. Hannah More explains, "in all that captivates by imagery or warms by just and affecting sentiment, women are excellent...They are acute observers, and accurate judges of life and manners, as far as their own sphere of observation extends..."¹⁵

Thirdly, the genre focused on love, the "postures of yearning, pleasing, choosing, slipping, falling, and failing," which are, as DuPlessis says, "some of the deep, shared structures of our culture" (2). The writers recognized that romance and the conventions of courtship, though exhilarating, served in many ways to confine women to the positions of mistress, wife, and mother. Instead of valorizing the conventional romantic tie, these women often wrote narratives which displaced the importance of the heterosexual relationship, giving a new definition to the meaning of love. In their novels the heroine's affection

and emotional attachments were frequently directed to other channels--to children, to family, to relations and to the poor. Gary Kelly points out that, for the English Jacobins, love meant the word in its "widest sense," including "the necessity of philanthropy" (267). Love became not only the impetuous and fiery passion depicted in many popular novels, but also sympathy, charity, respect and understanding.

Two figures who embodied this mixture of romance and rebellion in the second half of the eighteenth century were William Godwin and Jean Jacques Rousseau. Both were admired by these novelists because of their rebellious spirits, sensitivity, sense of justice, and philosophical minds--the same qualities the women sought in themselves. Both were concerned with the feelings and plight of the individual; both wrote fiction which combined "autobiography and fantasy" (Kelly, Jacobin, 266). Gary Kelly notes that there was "something androgynous about [Godwin's] cast of mind, as he himself admitted" which accounted for his attractiveness to such a wide range of female characters as Elizabeth Inchbald, Amelia Alderson, Mary Robinson, Mary Hays and Mary Wollstonecraft (Jacobin, 266).

As for Rousseau's influence, Kelly writes in his introduction to Wollstonecraft's Mary:

The Protestant son of republican Geneva spoke to Dissenters, Revolutionaries, to Enlightenment rationalists alike, but especially to the English Jacobin novelists, who were attempting to

renovate fiction with materials drawn from life. His Confessions revealed that his philosophical educational and political writings arose out of his peculiar character, background and experience, and that his novel, La Nouvelle Héloïse, welled from the deepest levels of his personality. Above all, he showed that the creation of fiction could be more than hack-work or genteel recreation, an experience in life that went beyond confession, reparation, or self-justification, to attempt to shape the author's life in a perpetual act of creation, a continual quest for self-awareness, a permanent 'revolution.'

("Introduction," Mary, viii).

Rather than submit blindly to traditions and beliefs, Godwin and Rousseau followed the dictates of their own hearts and minds. The trust in their own perceptions and experience inspired the women novelists. Most important of all, like them, the romantic revolutionary novelists advocated change; they believed in the improvement and ultimate perfectibility of humankind.

iii. Refashioning the Genre

By the second half of the eighteenth century, especially after the advent of Samuel Richardson's most important work, Clarissa, or, The History of a Young Lady (1747-8), novels with feminine titles, or those with female protagonists were quite common. What makes the literary creations of the romantic revolutionary women interesting is the various changes they wrought to this type of fiction. They wrote novels that differed in structure, particularly in the closure of the narrative; novels that displaced traditional values while reaffirming others; and those that introduced bolder and more emancipated heroines.

Perhaps the most significant innovation is in the closure of the narrative. J. Hillis Miller, in "The Problematic of Ending," points out that "the notion of ending in narrative is difficult to pin down, whether 'theoretically,' or for a given novel, or for the novels of a given period" (3). Nevertheless, he does speak of the "pleasure from 'an untying,'...the pleasure of the final eclaircissement," and the contrary pleasure, that "of closure" (5). Frank Kermode, in The Sense of an Ending, writes about our need to "experience that concordance of beginning, middle, and end which is the essence of our explanatory fictions, and especially when they belong to



cultural traditions which treat historical time as primarily rectilinear rather than cyclic" (35). Both agree that conclusions satisfy, though they never really "conclude" or resolve everything, but merely give the reader the "sense of an ending."

This sense of an ending, as J. Hillis Miller observes, is most commonly achieved by finishing the novel with either "marriage or death" (5). Nancy K. Miller, in her study of The Heroine's Text: Readings in the French and English Novel 1722-1782, finds that heroines in eighteenth century novels by men almost always meet death or marriage at the end. She makes the distinction between "euphoric" and "dysphoric" texts. In the first case, the "euphoric" pole, the novel ends in marriage, with the heroine's ascent and integration into society. The woman gains both financial and romantic success in the heterosexual contract, moving from "nothing to all" (xi). Such is the case with Pamela, Moll Flanders and Fanny Hill. In the second case, the "dysphoric" pole, the novel ends with the heroine's death in the flower of her youth, as she is betrayed by male authority and aggression. She moves from "all to nothing" (xi). Some examples Miller cites are Manon Lescault, Clarissa, Julie from La Nouvelle Héloïse, and the female characters in Les Liaisons Dangereuses.

DuPlessis says of this kind of narrative: "successful quest and romance could not coexist and be integrated for the female protagonist at the resolution" (x). Though



writing specifically about nineteenth century fiction

dealing with women, her observations apply equally well to the novels of the first half of the Eighteenth Century:

"usually quest or Bildung is set aside or repressed, whether by marriage or by death" (3). For the women writers of the 1790s, these endings were disappointing and inadequate. To them, marriage might be a consequential event, but entering the state usually in their late teens or early twenties, it came too soon in their lives to be a satisfying conclusion for an imaginative work. In addition, it too often proved to be a situation less than ideal in real life.

Death, on the other hand, was not a better resolution. Death either signaled the defeat of the heroine's quest or a kind of ironic triumph. If death were meant to be a glorious moment of victory for the heroine, one had to subscribe to notions of the after-life, female sacrifice, or feminine purity. In any case, it was a desperate rather than a pragmatic solution to women's problems.

Indeed, these women novelists reject all such definite endings because they were more interested in providing their readers with authentic experience and practical models, rather than aesthetic pleasure. For them, marriage in reality may be a new beginning, but it cannot, in all fictional seriousness, be mistaken for the finish line. As well, their own observations suggested that life was not so much a linear progression towards a tidy, teleological end but a series of repetitions and cycles. Domestic tasks,



such as washing, mending, housekeeping, child bearing and child rearing, were not jobs which lead from one logical stage to the next, but ongoing and regular concerns. Thus, their novels rarely end with such final solutions as marriage or death.

In their fiction marriage often occurs either near the beginning, or, as in most cases, halfway into the story. The main interest of their works does not lie in the courtship, the traditionally romantic period, but in the trials after the wedding. Marriage is depicted not as a blissful union, but as quotidian reality, with which one must cope. The lack of proper education of female children is particularly important here as it frequently is related to or can cause domestic unhappiness. Girls who have been trained to be either delicate show pieces or coquettes do not make good wives. Indeed, this theme is one which surfaces again and again in these novels by women.

A second way these women revolutionize the genre is by their emphasis on a different set of values. Virtue is no longer seen in terms of female sexual virtue, or chastity. As Nancy Miller notes, in the eighteenth century feminocentric novel, written by men, the female body follows more or less the chronological movement of the novel. The heroine's sexuality governed the progress and outcome of the fiction. In Miller's words, these works written by male authors were "the text of an ideology that codes femininity in paradigms of sexual vulnerability" (xi). On the other

hand, the texts produced by these female authors commend women for their sensibility, emotional capability, endurance, maternal sensitiveness and prudent judgement. Unlike the issues in the novels of Richardson, Cleland, or Defoe, what is at stake is no longer the politics of seduction, or the "drama of a single misstep" (Miller, x).

As well as stressing a different set of virtues, the novels of these writers offer an alternative portrait of women to those given by the patriarchs of the mid-century. Women are no longer depicted as innocent angels or vile seducers, catty rivals for the hand of one man, but as sensitive and intelligent beings, who are capable of rational thinking and emotional commitment. In their fiction, new kinds of heroines emerge: women who are not necessarily feminists in today's sense, but who, nevertheless, challenge age-old assumptions about the "weaker" sex.

Most important, their novels were revelations of the hitherto silent female consciousness. Because these women did not merely continue and follow "masculine" themes and structure in their writing, they succeeded in articulating the female side of human experience. They developed certain unexplored possibilities of the novel, using it to express female oppression and desire, and, in doing so, they show that women's epistemology can be the source of an autonomous art.

iv. Methodology: Toward a Contextualist Criticism

Before examining the works of these five women novelists, it is necessary to say a few words about the methodology or critical approach of this study. The traditional New Critical approach to these novels would be an ineffective and unrewarding exercise. As Terry Eagleton in Literary Theory observes, New Criticism sees the work of art "as a self-enclosed object, mysteriously intact in its own unique being" (47). It insists that "the author's intentions in writing, even if they could be recovered, were of no relevance to the interpretation of his or her text" (48). Hence, the text is studied in isolation, as a material fact, "whose functioning could be analysed rather as one could examine a machine" (3). A "close reading" of fictional texts normally consists of analyzing structures, dominant patterns of imagery or symbolism, and recurring themes. It would investigate the various "tensions, paradoxes, and ambivalences" of a work (49). The conclusion of such an approach is usually praise for the craftsmanship of the author, the organic unity or harmonious design of the work being studied.

Literary theorists, such as Eagleton and Catherine Belsey, have articulated many of the problems of this

methodology.¹⁶ One important objection relevant to this study is the method's uninvolvedness with social realities. As Eagleton puts it, reading in the New Critical way meant "committing yourself to nothing: all that poetry taught you was 'disinterestedness,' a serene, speculative impeccably even-handed rejection of anything in particular" (Eagleton, 50). Very often, New Criticism ignores the ideological nature of literature and creates an artificial separation between art and life.

With the novels chosen for this study, it is impossible to ignore the social and cultural contexts and ideologies of the works and their writers. Many of the texts are strongly dialectical, and self-consciously so. To scrutinize them as aesthetic icons or timeless works of art would almost be deliberately "mis-reading" them. Jane Tompkins, in her introduction to Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction 1790-1860 (1985), explains the need for a different area of investigation in order to understand neglected texts:

It involves, in its most ambitious form, a redefinition of literature and literary study, for it sees literary texts not as works of art embodying enduring themes in complex forms, but as attempts to redefine the social order. In this view, novels and stories should be studied not because they manage to escape the limitations of their particular time and place, but because they offer

powerful examples of the way a culture thinks about itself, articulating and proposing solutions for the problems that shape a particular historical moment. (xi)

Tompkins believes that in order to understand these works, that is, as she says, "to see them, insofar as possible, as as they were seen in the moment of their emergence, not as degraded attempts to pander to the prejudices of the multitude, but as providing men and women with a means of ordering the world they inhabit, one has to have a grasp of the cultural realities that made these novels meaningful" (xii-xiii). Proposing a comparable method, Marilyn L. Williamson, in "Toward a Feminist Literary History," says: "it is not enough simply to study nontraditional works from the perspective of the canon. It is also necessary to read texts according to the ideology they present" which may require a "sociohistorical, ideological method for their proper understanding" (137). Similarly, Germaine Greer, in an article explaining the value of feminist criticism to Women's Literature, expresses her view that in order to do justice to an obscure woman writer, one must study how the towering presence of the male author affected her, how she struggled to adapt the language which he forged to her own purposes, what degree of success she had in her own lifetime, and why the work did not survive (8).

In looking at Wollstonecraft, Hays, Williams, Inchbald and Smith, then, I examine their fiction in relation to

their social practices, domestic and personal situation, economic and political circumstances. Through this methodology I hope to recreate, as far as possible, the context that produced the novels. Hence, biographical material, letters, other writings such as poems, plays, essays and tracts are often referred to in my study. The object of this approach is to better comprehend the historical and cultural importance of the fictional works.

Aside from giving one a deeper understanding of the historical context of the novels, this approach allows one a finer appreciation of non-traditional texts. As many feminist critics have noted, measures of literary greatness, such as internal coherence, "realism," expression of universal truths, moral complexity, tidiness of narrative ending, are standards that are, more often than not, set by male critics. Nancy K. Miller, in "Emphasis Added: Plots and Plausibilities in Women's Fiction," explains

The attack on female plots and plausibilities assumes that women writers cannot or will not obey the rules of fiction. It also assumes that the truth devolving from verisimilitude is male. For sensibility, sensitivity, 'extravagance,'-- so many code words for feminine in our culture that the attack is in fact tautological--are taken to be not merely inferior modalities of production but deviations from some obvious truth. The blind spot here is both political (or philosophical) and

literary. It does not see, nor does it want to, that the fictions of desire behind the desiderata of fiction are masculine and not universal constructs. It does not see that the maxims that pass for the truth of human experience, and the encoding of that experience in literature, are organizations, when they are not fantasies, of the dominant culture. To read women's literature is to see and hear repeatedly a chafing against the 'unsatisfactory reality,' contained in the maxim. (46)

Hence, these women's writers are judged not so much for their skilfulness at obeying the rules of fiction, but for the individuality of their ideas, their ability to adapt and work with often limited resources, and their power to subvert the traditional order.

Expressing a similar intention, Jane Tompkins writes:

When one sets aside modernist demands--for psychological complexity, moral ambiguity, epistemological sophistication, stylistic density, formal economy--and attends to the way a text offers a blueprint for survival under a specific set of political, economic, social or religious conditions, an entirely new story begins to unfold and one's sense of the formal exigencies of narrative alters accordingly, producing a different conception of what constitutes successful charac-

ters and plots. (xvii)

With this way of reading, says Tompkins, "the text succeeds or fails on the basis of its 'fit' with the features of its immediate context, on the degree to which it provokes the desired response, and not in relation to unchanging formal, psychological, or philosophical standards of complexity, or truth or correctness" (xviii).

Other feminist critics share Miller and Tompkins' view that women's literature should be read with different standards of judgement. In "Treason Our Text: Feminist Challenges to the Literary Canon," Lillian Robinson argues that "a different criterion" is necessary for the literary canon: "that of truth to the culture being represented, the whole culture and not the creation of an entirely male white elite" (39). She believes that male authors give only their version of the way things are, often with negative results. For example, male writers show us female character and relations between the sexes in a way that both reflects and contributes to the sexist ideology.

Furthermore, by studying these neglected novels by women in their historical context, one acquires insight not only about women's literary inheritance, but, at the same time, gains a much more complete view of our literary tradition. As Germaine Greer puts it, "herstory" could "illumine the other side of the coin struck by official historians" (6). She speaks of the need to "reconstitute the literary landscape as composed of women as well as men, regardless of

the fact that the men were always more conspicuous" (7). Elaine Showalter, in "Towards a Feminist Poetics," calls the effort by feminist critics who study woman as writer "gynocritics" (25). Of the importance of resurrecting neglected texts by women, she writes:

Before we can even begin to ask how the literature of women would be different and special, we need to reconstruct its past, to rediscover the scores of women novelists, poets and dramatists whose work has been obscured by time, and to establish the continuity of the female tradition from decade to decade, rather than from Great Woman to Great Woman. As we recreate the chain of writers in this tradition, the patterns of influence and response from one generation to the next, we can also begin to challenge the periodicity of orthodox literary history, and its enshrined canons of achievement. It is because we have studied women writers in isolation that we have never grasped the connections between them. When we go beyond Austen, the Brontës and Eliot, say, to look at a hundred and fifty or more of their sister novelists, we can see patterns and phases in the evolution of a female tradition which correspond to the developmental phases of any subcultural art. (34-35)

Gynocritics then, Showalter contends, "begins at the point

when we free ourselves from the linear absolutes of male literary history, stop trying to fit women between the lines of male tradition, and focus instead on the newly visible world of female culture" (28).

Notes

¹ For example, Ernest Baker, in The Novel of Sentiment and the Gothic Romance, Vol. 5 of The History of the English Novel says "until the end of the century and the arrival of Maria Edgeworth and Jane Austen comes a period difficult to characterize, which would be called dull if it were judged by purely literary standards"(11).

² For a more extensive study of Bage, Holcroft, Inchbald and Godwin as "Jacobin," see Gary Kelly, The English Jacobin Novel 1780-1805.

³ See Ralph M. Wardle, Mary Wollstonecraft: A Critical Biography 258-9.

⁴ These reviews are reprinted in A Wollstonecraft Anthology, ed. with an introduction by Janet M. Todd.

⁵ See the introduction to Charlotte Smith, The Young Philosopher, 4 vols. Introd. Gina Luria.

⁶ Gina Luria explains the influence of these philosophers in "Mary Hays: A Critical Biography," 184 and ff.

⁷ William Godwin, Enquiry Concerning Political Justice, Abridged and Ed. K. Codell Carter 27.

⁸ Basil Willey, The Eighteenth Century Background 179-80.

⁹ Gary Kelly, Introduction to Mary Wollstonecraft,

Mary, A Fiction and The Wrongs of Woman, ed. with an introduction by Gary Kelly viii.

¹⁰ This term was first used for these women novelists by Kenneth L. Moler, Jane Austen's Art of Allusion 196-197.

¹¹ This review of Mrs. Elizabeth Norman's The Child of Woe could have been written by Mary Wollstonecraft. Wardle believes that the contributions to the Analytical Review signed M or W are by Wollstonecraft. See Ralph Wardle, "Mary Wollstonecraft, Analytical Reviewer" 1000-1009.

¹² Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature 21-22, as paraphrased by Samia I. Spencer, French Women and the Age of Enlightenment 203.

¹³ See J.M.S. Tompkins, The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800, 120-121.

¹⁴ As qtd. in Tompkins, 120-121, n.3.

¹⁵ Hannah More, Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education. 2 Vols. 2nd Ed. (London: T. Cadell, Jr. and W. Davies, 1799) 2:26, qtd. in Poovey, The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer 38.

¹⁶ See Terry Eagleton, Literary Theory 44-53 and Conclusion, and Catherine Belsey, Critical Practice, 15-20.

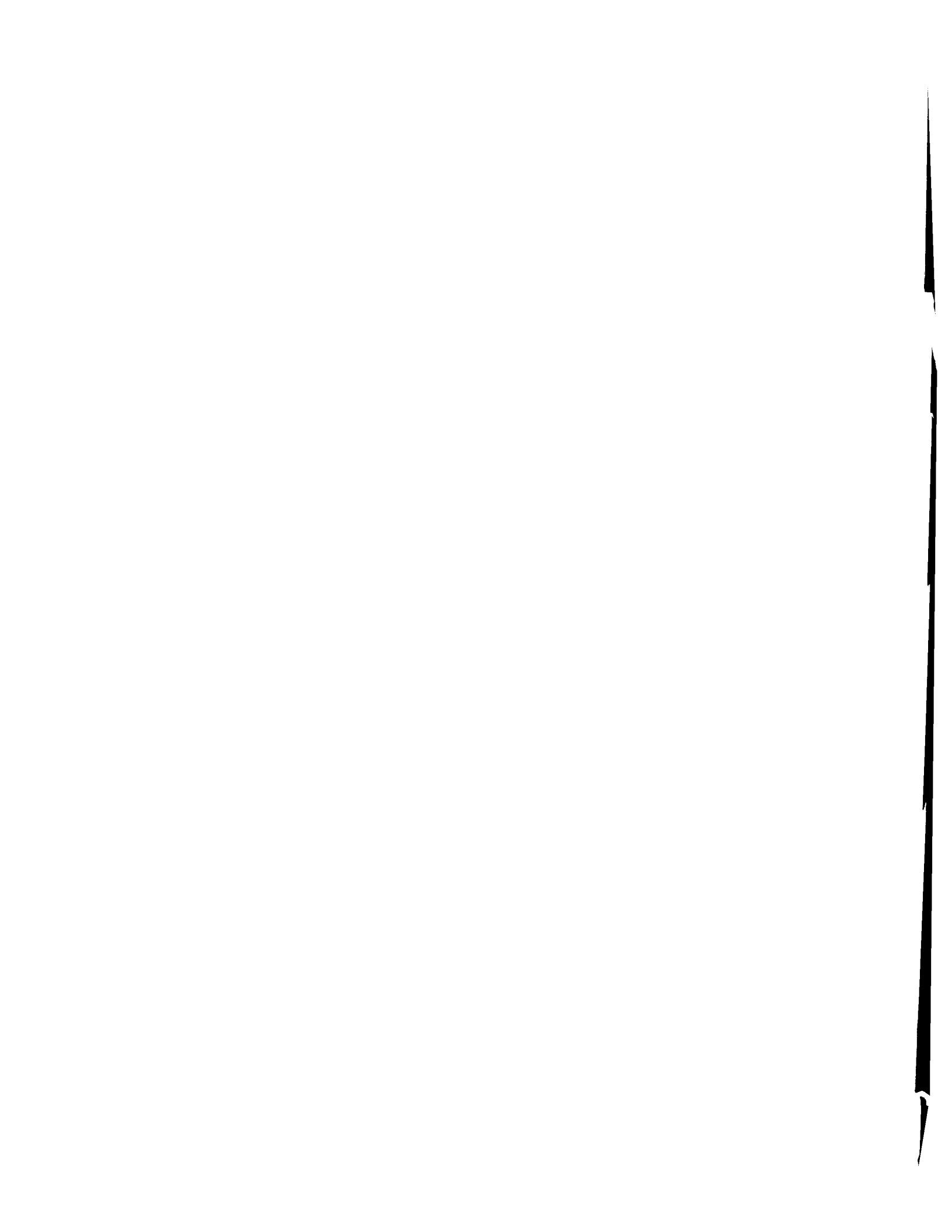
Chapter I

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT

Mary Wollstonecraft's life, with its dramatic and often melodramatic moments, has been the subject of many biographies since her husband, William Godwin, wrote his Memoirs of Mary Wollstonecraft (1798).¹ During her short existence, she was, as Kelly writes, "a traveller, a teacher, a family provider, and a defender of the weak; she was a mistress and a mother, before she was a wife; she saw and survived the French Revolution; and she was known and admired by some of the leading politicians, polemicists, publishers, preachers, poets, painters, novelists, and historians of the day" (Introduction, Mary, vii).

Born in 1759, Mary was the second of seven children. Her father, unsuccessful at farming, consoled himself for his failures by drinking to excess and tyrannizing his timid wife. Pampering her eldest son, her mother was unusually severe and neglectful of Mary, like the mother in Mary, A Fiction. Consequently, Mary sought affection elsewhere, forming close ties with her sister, Eliza, and with a friend, Fanny Blood. Much like the character Mary in her novel, she attempted, at separate times, to care for each of them.

Intending to support her sister and herself, she



started a school with Fanny in 1784. After Fanny's marriage and subsequent death at childbirth (1786), this venture failed. Until 1787 Mary became a governess for the Kingsboroughs, after which she joined Joseph Johnson's circle. Among the artists, writers, intellectuals and Dissenters in this group were William Blake; William Godwin; George Fordyce, the physician; John Bonnycastle, the mathematician; George Anderson; the classical scholar; Henry Fuseli, the Swiss painter; and Sarah Trimmer, the educator.

By 1788 Wollstonecraft had become a regular contributor to Johnson's Analytical Review, reviewing novels, books for children and essays on education. She had also published Thoughts on the Education of Daughters (1787) which questioned many traditional pedagogical methods and gave sensible, practical advice about the raising of female children. Original Stories from Real Life (1788), a book of tales for children, appeared in the same year as her first novel, Mary, a Fiction. Wardle describes this early novel as "a nice blend of autobiography and wishful thinking" (Introduction, Collected Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft, 34).

With her anonymously published tract, A Vindication of the Rights of Men (1790), Wollstonecraft became a minor celebrity: a female political amateur who had presumed to challenge a professional thinker. The subject matter and the success of the piece inspired her to write her most famous work, A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792). In

this pioneering feminist treatise, Wollstonecraft argued on behalf of women's moral and rational worth, contending that if woman "be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue" (Rights of Woman, 20). She believed that both women and men should have access to education because "without knowledge, there can be no morality" (141), and because "truth must be common to all, or it will be inefficacious with respect to its influence on general practice" (20). With its novel ideas the book attracted wide attention, and, before the end of the year, went into a second edition. Among its many admirers was Mary Hays, who wrote to Wollstonecraft praising the work, and asking if she could meet its author.

About this time she became strongly infatuated with Henry Fuseli. Convinced that hers was a purely rational desire, she asked permission of his wife to join their household. Emphatically refused by Mrs. Fuseli, Wollstonecraft then decided to embark on a trip to France, to view the Revolution at firsthand. In Paris she met French Girondins and their friends, Helen Maria Williams, Joel Barlow, Thomas Christie, Thomas Cooper, Tom Paine and Archibald Hamilton Rowan. Like Helen Maria Williams she attempted to record the historical event and finally published An Historical and Moral View of the Origin and Progress of the French Revolution (1794). Though her longest book, it was, according to Wardle, her "least



original" (Introduction, Collected Letters, 41). She intended to trace the course of the entire Revolution, but did not get beyond the first volume, which was confined to the early events of the conflict, three years before her arrival in Paris.

Though her career was virtually at a standstill, her personal life was not. In the spring of 1793 she met and fell in love with Gilbert Imlay, a land speculator and a former officer in the American Revolutionary Army. For a while the affair rendered Wollstonecraft ecstatically happy and resulted in the birth of a daughter, Fanny, in May 1794. Imlay, in the meantime, became neglectful and spent more and more time away on business. Wollstonecraft's frustration and bitterness are evident in her letters to him. One dated December 30, 1794 remonstrates: "The common run of men have such an ignoble way of thinking, that, if they debauch their hearts, and prostitute their persons, following perhaps a gust of inebriation, they suppose the wife, slave rather, whom they maintain, has no right to complain, and ought to receive the sultan, whenever he deigns to return, with open arms; though his have been polluted by half an hundred promiscuous amours during his absence" (Letters, 273).

To keep her busy and out of the way, Imlay sent Mary to take care of his business in the Scandinavian countries in June 1795. Letters Written During a Short Residence in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark (1796) is a charming book from this voyage which not only gives information about cooking,



housekeeping and other domestic matters, but also discusses the political, economic and religious practices of these countries. In his Memoirs of Wollstonecraft Godwin says of the work: "If ever there was a book calculated to make a man in love with its author, this appears to me to be the book" (84).

The pleasant diversion however soon ended. Returning to England, she found Imlay living with his new mistress. In October 1795 she attempted and failed to commit suicide by jumping from Putney Bridge. After her recovery, she parted company with Imlay, and forced herself to resume writing for the Analytical Review.

At a tea party given by Mary Hays in January 1796, Wollstonecraft met Godwin again. By April, they were seeing each other regularly, and became lovers in August of that year. Intending to expose the injustices suffered by women, she began her second work of fiction, The Wrongs of Woman, or; Maria. By December, Wollstonecraft found herself pregnant, and, in March of 1797, the man who had been apprehensive of marriage in Political Justice wedded Mary. Six months later, she died of complications resulting from childbirth.

i. Mary, A Fiction

Wollstonecraft's first novel, Mary, a Fiction, was written during the summer of 1787 while she was living as a governess with the Kingsborough family. Ten years later, Mary herself called it "a crude production," adding that she did not "very willingly put it...in the way of people whose opinion, as a writer, I wish for" (Collected Letters, 385). Much of the novel is autobiographical, as the title and the names of the characters suggest: Mary is the daughter of Edward and Eliza, characters partly based on Wollstonecraft's father Edward John, her mother, Elizabeth Dickson, and her employer Lady Kingsborough. Despite the similarities, however, Ralph Wardle maintains that "most of the plot...is imaginary" (Biography, 73). It is Mary's first attempt at exploring her world and coming to an understanding of herself in a fictional mode.

Wollstonecraft is conscious of the tradition of novels before her as she writes her first piece of fiction. As Gary Kelly notes: "Both title and preface of Mary, A Fiction carefully avoid the word novel" (Introduction, Mary, ix). Desiring to create a distinctive kind of text, she tells her readers in the Advertisement: "In delineating the Heroine of this Fiction, the Author attempts to develop a character different from those generally portrayed. This woman is neither a Clarissa, a Lady G-, nor a Sophie." The

allusions to Samuel Richardson's Clarissa and Lady Grandison, and to Rousseau's Sophie are significant. Wollstonecraft did not wish to create an exemplary character as Richardson did with Clarissa. Her Mary is not meant to be a spiritual or moral model of excellence for young ladies.² Nor did she want her heroine to be a typical aristocrat, as Lady G- was. In her Vindication of the Rights of Woman, she condemned Rousseau's Sophie as "captivating, though grossly unnatural" (65). She did not agree with the French philosopher who believed that women should be trained as coquettes, primarily to appeal to men's sensuality.

Hence Mary is unlike these other eighteenth century heroines. She is not the beautiful, desirable, perfect mistress, the prize of a hero's quest. Rather, she herself is the subject, the author and creator of her own destiny. Her story is about her development, her concerns, more than it is about a man's manipulation of her or his passion for her.

Mary is a good illustration of a romantic revolutionary novel. While the main concern of the work is the heroine's search for romance, for love and happiness, it touches on many social issues. Through the perspective of a sensitive, intelligent girl, Wollstonecraft shows the shortcomings of the institution of marriage, the education system for young girls, and the selfishness and artificiality of the upperclass. Structurally, the author does not follow traditional novels, which usually consist of a linear

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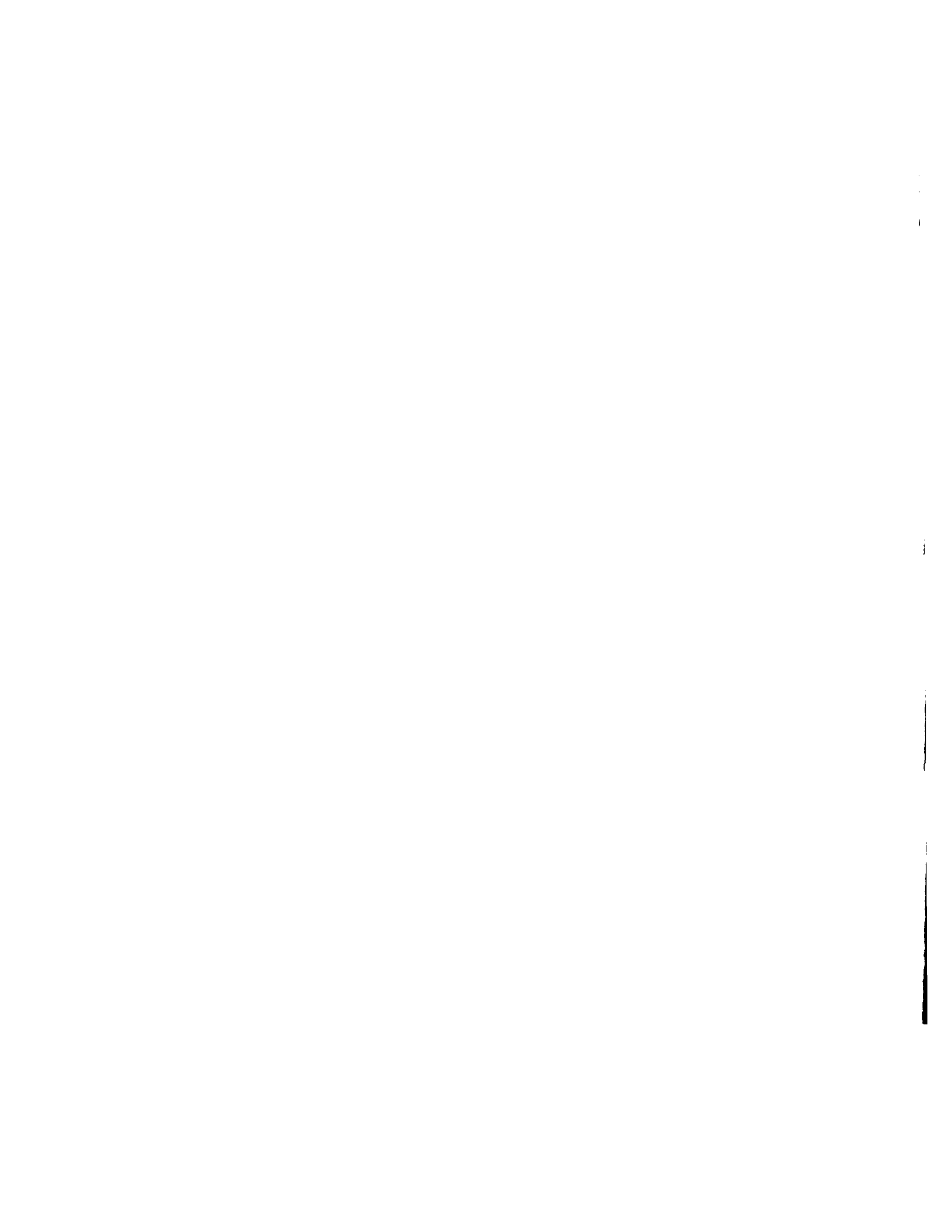
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progression of events leading to either a comic or tragic ending. Instead the narrative is organized around the consciousness of the heroine, and finishes with a rather indefinite and ambiguous ending.

As in Wollstonecraft's other novel, The Wrongs of Woman: Or, Maria, and in Inchbald's A Simple Story, the novel does not culminate with the happy marriage of the heroine to the hero. Rather, the story deals with the kinds of problems which can occur following a hasty marriage made at an early age. In Mary the seventeen year old heroine obeys her mother's dying wishes and marries the son of her father's friend. Mary, standing "like a statue of Despair," pronounces "the awful vow without thinking of it" and finds herself married to "a boy she seldom took any notice of" (15). What follows in the novel is an attempt by the heroine, who, like Wollstonecraft herself, is "the creature of impulse, and the slave of compassion" (7), to continue to enjoy the charms afforded by her sensibility and to pursue intellectual interests despite her misalliance.

Wollstonecraft's first work of fiction, then, differs from the novels of the times in several important aspects. It tries to articulate the emotions and yearnings of a female protagonist whose consciousness becomes the focus of the narrative. Unlike other eighteenth century novels with feminine names in their titles, such as Moll Flanders, Roxana, Pamela, Clarissa and Amelia, it is not primarily concerned with the heroine's sexuality nor with her



suitability as a man's partner. It portrays a heroine on a search, a quest whose goal is not necessarily that of marriage. Finally, it is unconventional because of its conclusion. Instead of offering her readers a traditionally happy ending, what J.M.S. Tompkins calls "compensation, ideal pleasures and ideal revenge" (129), Wollstonecraft shows the dangers of the romance genre, focusing instead on the problems in real life, the deficiencies in women's social situations, in marriage and in education.

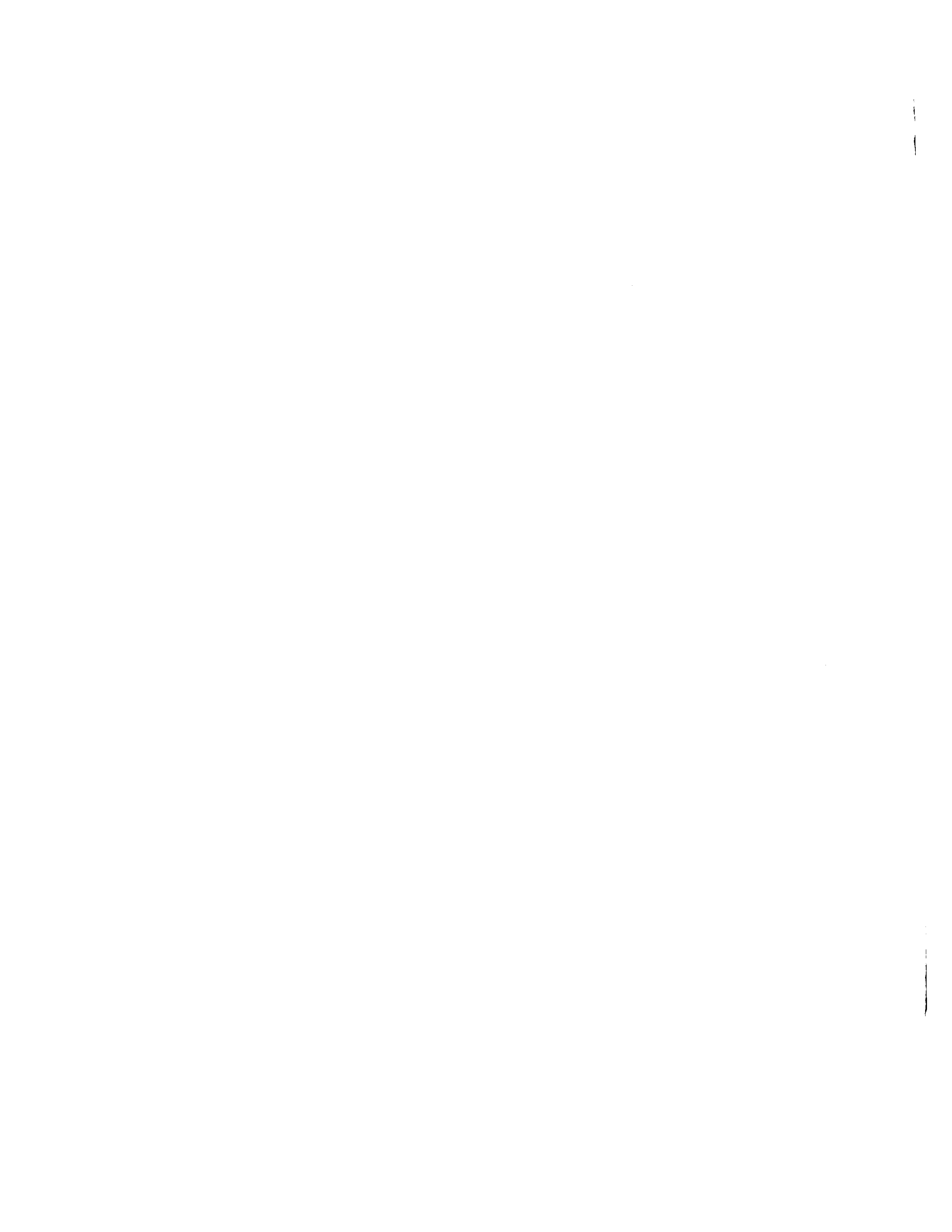


Upperclass Women: Marriage, Pedagogy and Pastime

Though Mary, A Fiction was not intended, like The Wrongs of Woman, or Maria, primarily to be didactic it still contains important criticism of the leisured class. In particular, Wollstonecraft is concerned about the deficiencies in the upbringing and the education of female children, and the practice of marrying girls off at an early age.

Wollstonecraft's thoughts about these issues are not expressed as explicitly as one would like in the novel itself. However, when examined with Thoughts on the Education of Daughters, with Reflections on Female Conduct, in the More Important Duties of Life, which was published just a year earlier, they become clearer and make more sense. For example, in the beginning of the novel the author gives an elaborate description of Mary's mother, Eliza, which seems to have no bearing on the protagonist's story:

[Eliza] carefully attended to the shews of things, and her opinions, I should have said prejudices, were such as the generality approved of. She was educated with the expectation of a large fortune, of course became a mere machine: the homage of her attendants made a great part of her puerile amusements, and she never imagined



there were any relative duties for her to fulfil: notions of her own consequence, by these means, were interwoven in her mind, and the years spent in acquiring a few superficial accomplishments, without having any taste for them. (1)

Wollstonecraft is objecting to several things here about the life of women. First, she believes that girls are taught to put too much emphasis on appearances, on "the shews of things." In Education of Daughters she speaks against "artificial manners" (30), saying: "it is easier to copy the cast of countenance, than to cultivate the virtues which animate and improve it. How many people are like whitened sepulchres, and careful only about appearances!" (30-31). Eliza is like the three ladies "of rank," whom Mary later meets vacationing in Lisbon. They, too, are concerned only with appearances:

Their minds were shackled with a set of notions concerning propriety, the fitness of things for the world's eye, trammels which always hamper weak people. What will the world say? was the first thing that was thought of, when they intended doing any thing they had not done before" (24).

Wollstonecraft herself always acted according to her beliefs rather than according to what the world endorsed. She did not believe in doing anything merely for the sake of appearance.

Secondly, she felt that children should not be left too

much in servants' care. Servants often flatter their charges, pay them "homage," which gives children a false notion of their own importance. In Education of Daughters she cautions her readers against servants, pointing out that servants are "bad examples" because they frequently practise "art" and "cunning" (14).

Wollstonecraft uses Eliza as a negative example for Mary, her heroine. The mother "never imagined there were any relative duties for her to fulfil" (1). She spends her time "dressing her hair," reading sentimental novels, and caressing her "two most beautiful dogs, who shared her bed, and reclined on cushions near her all the day" (3). The heroine, on the other hand, though mistress of a fortune, later refuses to indulge in the idle life of a leisured lady. Instead, she actively practises charity, not only by giving financial help to the needy families in the neighborhood, but also by giving moral support and practical advice to them. Mary also dedicates much of her energy to helping her friend, Ann, who is poor and suffers from ill health. The device of juxtaposing the characters of the mother and her daughter is similarly used by Inchbald in A Simple Story.

Like Williams and Inchbald, Wollstonecraft disapproved of the aspect of the education of girls which placed emphasis on the acquisition of "superficial accomplishments" such as art, French, music and dancing. Wollstonecraft's objection to this type of learning stems not from the arts

themselves, but from the fact that girls are only taught these at a superficial, almost useless, level. In the novel the mother never acquires a taste for them. Similarly, the three ladies who were taught "French, Italian, and Spanish" learned nothing but "words" without "having any seeds sown in their understanding" (24). In the Education of Daughters Wollstonecraft explains:

Girls learn something of music, drawing, and geography; but they do not know enough to engage their attention, and render it an employment of the mind. If they can play over a few tunes to their acquaintance, and have a drawing or two...to hang up in their rooms, they imagine themselves artists for the rest of their lives. (26)

She believes that these trifles, rather than helping in any practical way, only encourage vanity in female children.

Finally, Wollstonecraft is against the practice of early matrimony. In the novel, both Eliza and Mary are married off because of their parents' desire for economic gain. Eliza "readily submitted" to the will of her father and "promised to love, honour, and obey, (a vicious fool), as in duty bound" (1). Consequently, she often feels unhappy and neglected. She and her husband "lived in the usual fashionable style, and seldom saw each other" (1). When they were in the country, he left her, went hunting in the morning, and then visited "some of his pretty tenants" after dinner (1).

Mary, too, becomes the victim of her father's desire for familial aggrandizement. To prevent any further disputes over a part of the estate she was to inherit, her father and her husband's father determined, "over a bottle," to unite the two estates by the marriage of their children (12). This union, like that of her mother's, is made before the girl has been given time to learn to think and judge for herself. In Education of Daughters Wollstonecraft contends that girls should be educated before they are married. She says:

In a comfortable situation, a cultivated mind is necessary to render a woman contented; and in a miserable one, it is her only consolation. A sensible, delicate woman, who by some strange accident, or mistake, is joined to a fool or a brute, must be wretched beyond all names of wretchedness, if her views are confined to the present scene. Of what importance, then, is intellectual improvement, when our comfort here, and happiness hereafter, depends upon it. (101-102)

Mary, a Fiction thematizes this idea, showing how a woman, because she was married early, spends the rest of her life searching for different kinds of intellectual stimulation and emotional fulfillment. From Mary's refusal to become just another typical aristocratic lady like her mother comes much of the tension and interest of the novel.

Woman and the Question of Sensibility

In his study of the History of the English Novel Ernest Baker says that Wollstonecraft's Mary, A Fiction is "a moving story, partly of her own life, ...which would have been still more moving perhaps had she not conformed to the prevailing taste for analysis of sensibility" (5. 252). Baker fails to see one of the central aims of the novel. Wollstonecraft writes Mary in order to come to an understanding of herself and her sex. It was important for her to find out whether the traits usually associated with women--femininity, delicacy, sympathy--were inborn or acquired. As Kelly says in his Introduction to the novel: "Mary reconstructs her mental history in an effort to free herself from the past, and the 'association of ideas' which produced her excessive sensibility" (xi).

For Wollstonecraft sensibility was problematic. On the one hand, the word was increasingly being used to suggest a capacity for refined emotion, for sensitivity, and for readiness to feel compassion. On the other hand, it was also associated with a particular image of the weak: the tearful, palpitating, and susceptible woman. J.M.S. Tompkins says:

To the eighteenth century [sensibility] was a significant, an almost sacred word, for it enshrined the progress of the human race. Sensi-

bility was a modern quality;...modern security, leisure and education had evolved a delicacy of sensation, a refinement of virtue, which the age found even more beautiful. The human sympathies, which a rougher age had repressed, expanded widely, especially towards the weak and unfortunate, and social conscience began to occupy itself with prisoners, children, animals and slaves. (92-93)

While Wollstonecraft recognized that the trait could be the impetus for acts of charity, for the most part she opposed the cultivation of too much sensibility in women. Quoting in the Rights of Woman Johnson's definition of sensibility as "quickness sensation; quickness of perception, delicacy," she observes: "the definition gives me no other idea than of the most exquisitely polished instinct" (141).

In Mary A Fiction this sentiment is partly responsible for the heroine's unhappiness: Mary's "sensibility prompted her to search for an object to love; on earth it was not to be found" (5). Her mother's neglect of her made her more vulnerable; it "produced "a kind of habitual melancholy, led her into a fondness for reading tales of woe, and made her almost realize the fictitious distress" (6). Later, Mary agrees to wed Charles because the "sight of a dying parent" moved her and the languid mother's affectionate "words reached her heart" (15). This kind of excessive feeling in females is precisely what Wollstonecraft was opposed to in

the Rights of Woman. In her treatise she states: "This overstretched sensibility naturally relaxes the other powers of the mind, and prevents intellect from attaining that sovereignty which it ought to attain to render a rational creature useful to others" (138).

Wollstonecraft saw the dangers when women let their emotions rule over reason. She writes:

[Women's] senses are inflamed and their understanding neglected, consequently they become the prey of their senses, delicately termed sensibility, and are blown about by every momentary gust of feeling...Ever restless and anxious, their over exercised sensibility not only renders them uncomfortable themselves, but troublesome, to use a soft phrase, to others. All their thoughts turn on things calculated to excite emotion; and feelings, when they should reason, their conduct is unstable, and their opinions wavering. (136-7)

Wollstonecraft uses her heroine to illustrate this problem in the education of women. As a young girl Mary's heightened sensibility causes her to be restless; she wanders about uncertain of where to place her sympathies. She tries denying herself "every childish gratification, in order to relieve the necessities" of the poor (10). The narrator ironically comments on her simple sacrifices: "Her benevolence, indeed, knew no bounds; the distress of others carried her out of herself; and she rested not till she had

relieved or comforted them" (10). Wollstonecraft's attitude to the young Mary is a mixture of sympathy and ridicule. She does not condemn Mary's charitable actions, but the excessive language reveals her awareness that Mary's motives are somewhat confused. Mary lets her emotions rather than her reason be her guide.

Analyzing Mary's growth to maturity enables Wollstonecraft to explain why women are different from men. In showing Mary's development, she demonstrates that being sensitive and sentimental are the results of education, upbringing and circumstances, not inherent "given" qualities in women. Such a theory about human development echoes Godwin's philosophy of necessity which also stresses the importance of external situations rather than internal elements as motivations for people's behaviour. In Political Justice Godwin writes: "the actions and dispositions of men are not the offspring of any original bias that they bring into the world in favour of one sentiment of character rather than another, but flow entirely from the operation of circumstances and events acting upon a faculty of receiving sensible impressions" (28).

Thus, if traditionally "feminine" characteristics, such as delicacy, softness and sensibility, were the result of circumstances and childhood influences rather than biological factors, then women did not necessarily have to possess or be ruled by these qualities. Neither would they

have to follow one physician, John Ball's, rather drastic advice. He says that to cure hysteria, or excessive sensibility, "a woman's best remedy is to marry, and bear children (qtd. in Mullan, 161). Simply with a different kind of upbringing, women could become rational creatures, and be distinguished by "reason, virtue and knowledge", which Wollstonecraft in Rights of Woman valued over beauty (41).

In the novel, though, Wollstonecraft is not quite sure of what to do with her heroine's heightened sensibility. At one point Mary is ecstatic about her "delicacy of feeling," as she thinks that it "enables us to relish the sublime touches of the poet, and the painter; it...expands the soul, gives an enthusiastic greatness, mixed with tenderness, when we view the magnificent objects of nature; or hear of a good action" (53-54). Yet at another occasion she believes in the need to control sensibility as it produces flights of virtue and not curbed by reason, is on the brink of vice talking" (55). From her assertions in Rights of Woman, we know that Wollstonecraft herself endorses this view of sensibility "curbed by reason." It is perhaps why she has Mary convincingly tell Henry: "My affections are involuntary--yet they can only be fixed by reflection, and when they are they make quite a part of my soul, are interwoven in it, animate my actions, and form my taste: certain qualities are calculated to call forth my sympathies, and make me all I am capable of being"

(39). Men and women, then, can benefit from this emotion, as long as they remember that it has to be kept in rein by good sense.



STRUCTURE: Innovative Plotlessness

The plot and structure of Mary, A Fiction has been often disparaged. In his introduction to the work, Gary Kelly says that "Mary is a radical novel, and it traces the causes of one woman's condition to their roots; but it offers no solutions and apportions no blame" (xii). He adds that the novel has a "hasty and carelessly written ending" (xx). While Kelly appreciates the fact that Mary is "radical," he is not willing to judge the work on a different set of criteria from conventional kinds of novels. Wollstonecraft, in her Advertisement, explains that Mary is "an artless tale, without episodes," where "the mind of a woman who has thinking powers is displayed." Mary is, as its author says, "without episodes," and without a conventionally closed conclusion.

Because the work does not fulfill a traditional reader's expectations of a novel, it does not necessarily follow that Mary is flawed as a piece of fiction. In fact, it succeeds in doing precisely what Wollstonecraft says: it displays "the mind of a woman who has thinking powers." Anticipating twentieth century writers such as Virginia Woolf and Dorothy Richardson, Wollstonecraft lets her readers enter into the consciousness of her heroine, structuring her novel according to Mary's thoughts rather than imposing an external order, an artificial sense of

beginning, middle, and end. In some ways, this kind of plotless form gives a truer picture of woman's experience than the well-defined novelistic designs created by male writers. Mitzi Meyers says: "Diffusion and discontinuity are necessary concomitants of women's effort to render their lives, which they perceive not as logical, linear progress toward a goal but as disconnected units of experience, a series of socially conditioned roles" ("Romantic Autobiography," 169). For Wollstonecraft, as well as the other women writers, life was not so much a step by step movement towards a clear-cut, foreseeable end, but a series of experiences in quotidian reality over which they often had little or no control. The form and subject matter of their novels reflect this more disjointed, more precarious world view.

The plot of Mary, A Fiction is loose, even scanty in many places. Shortly after their marriage, Mary's husband sets off for the continent, leaving Mary alone with her friend Ann. Since the physicians recommend a change of air for both girls, Mary and Ann travel to Lisbon. There Mary meets Henry, a man of learning and sensibility. They exchange ideas, enjoy music, and become good friends. Because of Mary's husband, however, their relationship cannot develop. In the meantime Henry becomes very ill, is nursed and comforted by Mary, and dies. The story ends with Mary's trying to fill a "void" in her heart (63).

Looking at Wollstonecraft's composition from the

standpoint of a traditional realistic novel, one finds that it does not measure up well. There are many unanswered questions: the reader is not told exactly why Mary abhors her husband, why she likes Henry, or what is wrong with their marriage. Nothing is concluded at the end, and the reader is left wondering what to make of the work as a whole. However, novelistic conventions aside, the book stands as an important achievement in literary history. It is, in some ways, similar to Virginia Woolf's novels, depicting feelings, moods, ideas, and representing situations and characters rather than portraying a realistic history. In artistic terms, it is closer to impressionism than to photographic realism.

Through its fluid structure and its lyrical prose, Wollstonecraft's first novel articulates female consciousness, and expresses female oppression and desire for self-fulfillment. Largely ignoring external dimensions such as time and place, the work concentrates more on Mary's internal development. It is probably the first English Bildungsroman by a woman and about a woman. In a letter Wollstonecraft describes Mary as "a tale, to illustrate an opinion of [hers], that a genius will educate itself" (162). Hence, the book follows Mary's mental and spiritual growth from that of naive romanticism to a mature, philosophical acceptance of things.

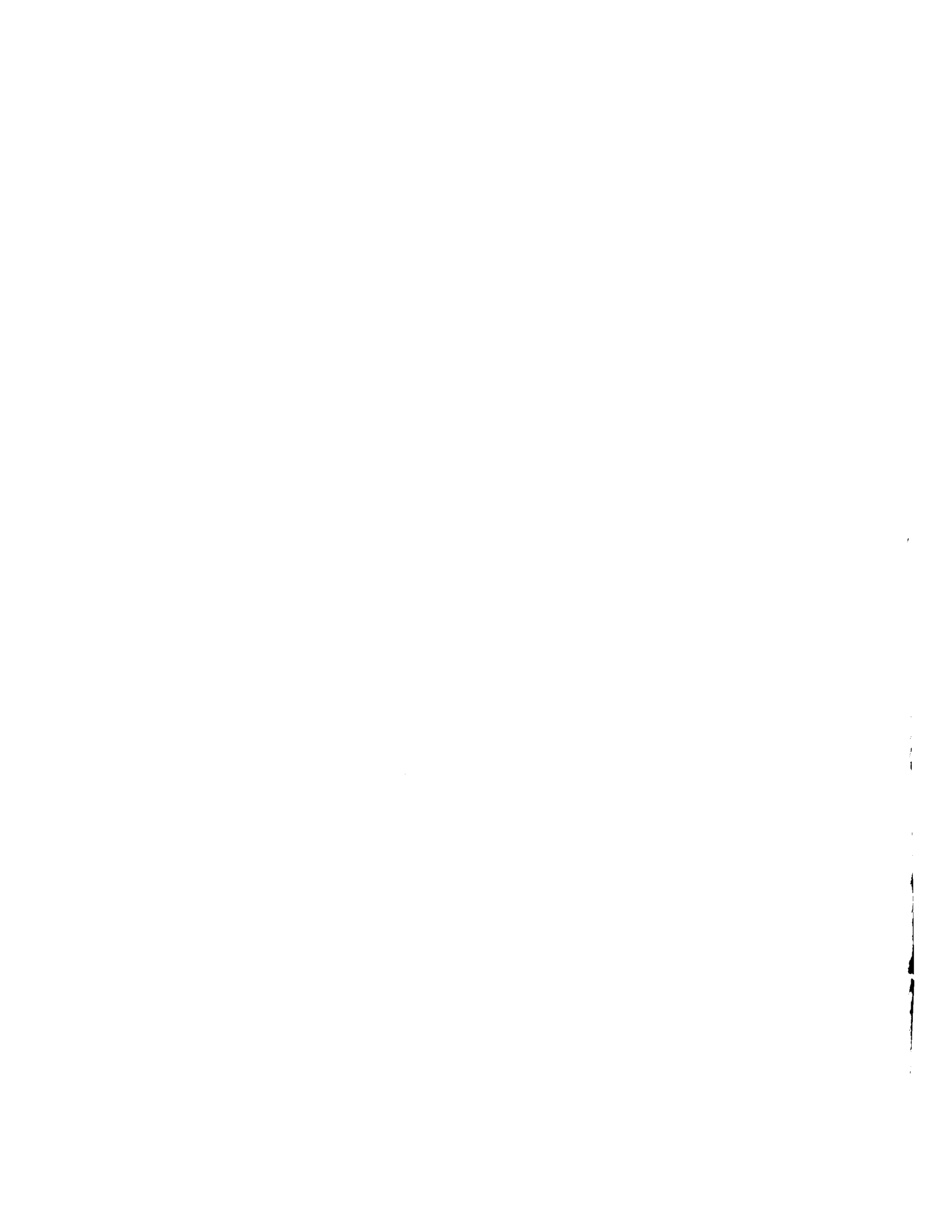
Wollstonecraft believes that one's ideas, one's thoughts and feelings are as significant and interesting as

the events that happen around her. Shortly after writing her first fiction, she reviewed Rousseau's Confessions favorably, stating that "a description of what has actually passed in a human mind must ever be useful" (qtd. in Meyers, "Romantic Autobiography," 176). In Mary she creates a heroine who learns to judge and think for herself:

[Mary] indulged herself in viewing new modes of life, and searching out the causes which produced them. She had a metaphysical turn, which inclined her to reflect on every object that passed by her; and her mind was not like a mirror, which receives every floating image, but does not retain them: she had not any prejudices, for every opinion was examined before it was adopted. (23)

This method of individual examination and deliberation is characteristic of the author herself. Meyers says that Wollstonecraft's general ideology is "based on direct observation and independent thought" (167). Meyers explains: "Always stressing naturalness, originality, and thinking for oneself, she is a very personal writer in both theory and practice, from her first novel to her last essays; the individual vision is central to her work. Her fiction is organized around her heroine's content of consciousness" (167). This emphasis on personal feeling and observation rather than on traditional beliefs is part of the rebellious spirit of the romantic revolutionaries.

Concentrating on the development of the heroine's



consciousness instead of on a linear plot enables Wollstonecraft to better convey the sense of female dissatisfaction with life. For Mary as for many upper class women, one big problem was that not much happened, or was allowed to happen, in their lives. Deprived of the right to exercise their intellectual energy, they searched vainly for other means of fulfillment. Mary's despair and agony arise from the inability to utilize her mental faculties and to find a kindred being to whom she can communicate her "troubled spirit" (44). The writing in her "little book" reveals the sense of disenchantment with her present lot and her yearning for a fuller life:

Surely any thing like happiness is madness!....I try to pierce the gloom, and find a resting-place, where my thirst of knowledge will be gratified, and my ardent affections find an object to fix them. Every thing material must change; happiness and this fluctuating principle is not compatible. (47)

Mary's definition of happiness is representative of the attitude of the romantic revolutionaries. For them, the ideal life consisted not only of the fulfillment of romantic love, but also of the gratification of intellectual passion, what Mary calls her "thirst of knowledge." It was not enough to have, as Mary had, money and time for superficial luxuries. It was equally important for women to have the ability and the opportunity to express their beliefs and their opinions to an enlightened audience.

A FEMININE ENDING

Wollstonecraft does not devote much time to the conclusion of the novel. Mary ends abruptly and rather briefly. After Henry's death, Mary never again finds the same kind of happiness she enjoyed with him. She feels the same disgust for her husband, yet promises to live with him, if he will permit her to pass one year, travelling by herself. After the year elapses, Mary consoles herself by making the estate into small farms, establishing "manufactories," visiting the sick and the old, and educating the young. Though these "occupations engrossed her mind;...there were hours when all her former woes would return and haunt her" (67).

Wollstonecraft could have finished her novel with the traditional happy ending of matrimony by getting rid of Mary's husband and having her marry Henry, the "man of learning" (27). Instead the author closes her first novel with a rather ambiguous line: "[Mary] thought she was hastening to that world where there is neither marrying, nor giving in marriage" (68). Deliberately avoiding a precise event as a wedding or the the finality of an actual death, the book ends with Mary contemplating, and waiting for some kind of release from her life.³ Wollstonecraft resists the more definite, more common finish for a more open-ended one. Waiting implies a continuation of life, and thus, for

Mary, more endurance and suffering.

This ending, like many others written by the romantic revolutionary novelists, is truer to the experience of women than the finite closed conclusions often preferred by male writers. For this ending reflects the unresolved and ongoing conflict between the female search for self-fulfillment and the social expectations of women as wife, mother or mistress. In traditional narratives the quest for intellectual and spiritual accomplishments is in most cases subservient to the enchantment of romance and eventual marriage. Wollstonecraft resists the imaginative gratification of a love story in order to make her readers aware of the tension, the dilemmas, inherent in these socially assigned places for women. Her ending points out that Mary is not and will never be happy with her limited role as Charles' wife.

Though Mary is not a typical novel of the romantic revolutionary writers, it shares many of the characteristics and the ideals of their novels. It is perhaps shorter and less developed in terms of plot and character than most, but its main interest, a woman seeking for emotional, mental and spiritual satisfaction, is characteristic of these works. It uses the genre of a romance novel to put forth revolutionary ideas about the needs of women, their limited functions in society, and their perception of an ideal man.

In the context of women's literature, Mary is important in a number of ways. It articulates female consciousness,

and expresses women's desire for self-fulfillment. In its depiction of a married woman on a search for self and a quest for happiness, it challenges the orthodox assumption that marriage is the ultimate goal and haven for every woman. In its creation of a heroine who does not abide by the rules of the dominant ideology, it revolutionizes conventional conceptions of woman. But most important of all, it showed the possibilities of using the woman's experience as the basis for the production of a fictional work.

ii. The Wrongs of Woman: or, Maria.

While the heroine of Mary, A Fiction suffers from mental and spiritual malnutrition, the heroine of Wollstonecraft's last novel, The Wrongs of Woman (1798), undergoes all forms of deprivation, including emotional and physical ones. As the title suggests, the book is a conscious attempt to fictionalize and thematize Wollstonecraft's ideas about the injustices or "wrongs" from which women suffer. Modelled after William Godwin's Things As They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams (1794), the plight of woman is intensified, indeed deliberately exaggerated, to achieve its purpose.

Godwin's novel restates in a fictional mode the central concerns of his Enquiry Concerning Political Justice (1793): that all man-made institutions are radically corrupt. Following his example, Wollstonecraft translated her arguments from A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792) into fiction. Her "main object," she says in the Author's Preface, is to exhibit "the misery and oppression, peculiar to women, that arise out of the partial laws and customs of society" (72). She believes that the story "ought rather to be considered, as of woman, than of an individual" (73). Her novel shows that wrongs, though "necessarily various," are directed to women of all classes (74).

The Prison as Metaphor: Actualization and Thematization

The Wrongs of Woman is an explicit thematization of the heroine's observation: "Was not the world a vast prison, and women born slaves?" (79). The story opens with Maria confined in a madhouse⁴ by her husband so he can control her property. Like Mary, Maria suffers from her excessive sensibility; both heroines are unhappy because of their incompatible marriage foolishly made in youth. Maria realizes too late that she has promised to obey a man who is an irresponsible gambler, a drinker, and a lover of vulgar women. After tolerating her husband's many excesses, including his attempt to use her as payment for a debt, Maria decides to free herself from him and run away. But she is "hunted like an infected beast" and like "a criminal from place to place" by him till she is finally locked up (178, 196).

The novel begins, as Mary Poovey notes, in medias res ("Gender of Genres," 114). Unlike Mary, A Fiction which moves from a kind of innocence to experience, The Wrongs of Woman opens with the heroine's having to reassess herself and the society she lives in because of her many negative experiences. The reader is plunged into a situation where, like Maria, she has to judge for herself; to make meaning out of essentially chaotic and incongruous elements

presented by the narrative. She has to orient herself temporally and spatially in a text which has seemingly not taken the reader into account in its ordering processes. In effect, the reader's initial confusion parallels that of Maria's disorientation.

In the opening scene, Maria wakes to find herself in a "mansion of despair," a madhouse, described as a Gothic castle. Maria's companions are "terrific inhabitants, whose groans and shrieks were...such tones of misery as carry a dreadful certainty directly to the heart" (75). The horror intended by the description is physically real as well as psychological: "The retreating shadows of former sorrows rushed back in a gloomy train, and seemed to be pictured on the walls of her prison, magnified by the state of mind in which they were viewed" (75). Marilyn Butler says, "Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft were drawn to the Gothic, because it had developed powerful images for conveying the idea of an oppressive, coercive environment....not for exploring life within the individual, but the clash between the victimized individual and the social institution" ("Woman at the Window," 1:134). For Wollstonecraft, the prison-like asylum represents the oppressive restriction of an individual, in particular, that of woman. Maria's confinement is an exaggerated case of a husband's tyranny, as the author wishes to show the injustice of a society which limits women, regardless of their capability, to domestic duties and frivolous arts. For Maria as for most women, the

restriction is physical, as well as social and psychological.

Wollstonecraft had confronted this problem earlier in A Vindication of the Rights of Woman (1792). In this her most famous polemical work, she objects to the restrictive and circumscribed education of girls. She contends that "if [woman] be not prepared by education to become the companion of man, she will stop the progress of knowledge and virtue; for truth must be common to all, or it will be inefficacious with respect to its influence on general practice" (20). For Wollstonecraft, "true dignity and human happiness consists...both of mind and body" (34). She believes in treating women "like rational creatures" (34), instead of "mere animals...mere propagators of fools" (36). Women are limited, "dependent on men in the various relations of life" (37) because the "only way [they] can rise in the world [is] by marriage" (36).

In The Wrongs of Woman Wollstonecraft shows that this dependency can cause a kind of imprisonment. It leads to the considerable abuse of women by men. Maria's story exposes the injustices perpetrated on women of the middle class which were legal under the judicial system of the late eighteenth century. Once married, Maria realizes that she "had been caught in a trap, and caged for life" (144). She loses control of her property, her person and even her child. She has to tolerate neglect, ill-treatment, and emotional degradation. Her husband, George Venables,

"appeared to have little relish for [her] society," except when he needed her money for his "fraudulent speculations" (145, 155). Maria cannot share with him her enthusiasm for the theatre or for society. She has to endure in silence his fondness for "wantons of the lowest class" (146), and his frequent drunkenness. She articulates the injustice of the "double standard" of sexual morality in society:

A man would only be expected to maintain; yes, barely grant a subsistence, to a woman rendered odious by habitual intoxication; but who would expect him, or think it possible to love her?... whilst woman, weak in reason, impotent in will, is required to moralize, sentimentalize herself to stone, and pine her life away, labouring to reform her embruted mate. He may even spend in dissipation, and intemperance, the very intemperance which renders him so hateful, her property, and by stinting her expences, not permit her to beguile in society, a wearisome, joyless life; for over their mutual fortune she has no power, it must all pass through his hand. (154)

Though she possessed a small fortune, Maria discovers that "marriage had bastilled [her] for life" (155). Instead of being able to enjoy "the various pleasures existence affords," she felt "fettered by the partial laws," so that "this fair globe was to [her] an universal blank" (155).

Yet Maria's story is only one of many examples of

female oppression in the novel. Wollstonecraft demonstrates the powerlessness of women of different backgrounds under the social and legal system. Her novel is structured so that the metaphor of the world as a prison for women is not only literalized in the story, but also actualized in the text. Static compared to the works of Defoe, Fielding or Smollett which are characterized by activity, bustle and movement, Wollstonecraft's last novel confines reader, writer and narrator in a dungeon-like private madhouse. They are forced to listen to story after story of injustice and atrocity told by various female voices. Rather than having a linear plot structure which advances from one logical point to another, the plot of the Wrongs of Woman moves in a circular, web-like fashion, confronting the same problem in various ways again and again.

Parallel Diegesis: Jemima's Case

Juxtaposed to Maria's first person narrative is the account of Jemima, Maria's prison warden. Jemima's story, unlike Maria's, is anti-romantic and completely unsentimental. An illegitimate child born of a poor servant girl, Jemima's whole life has been a series of exploitations, particularly of her sexuality. Raped and impregnated by her master at sixteen, Jemima is used by one man after another. She says: "I was, in fact, born a slave, and chained by infamy to slavery during the whole of existence, without having any companions to alleviate it by sympathy, or teach me how to rise above it by their example" (106). Brought up in poverty, without affection and without education, Jemima seems to have survived only by sheer willpower and her animal-like instincts. She describes herself as "the filching cat, the ravenous dog, the dumb brute" (105). Wollstonecraft displaces the sentimental myth of the "fortunate" orphan--the most famous one being Fielding's Tom Jones--who, though born without social sanction, manages to become integrated into the community by some chance or good fortune by the end of the novel. Jemima, on the other hand, remains an outcast throughout her life: she is "an egg dropped on the sand; a pauper by nature, hunted from family to family, who belonged to nobody" (106).

To complicate matters further, Jemima is born a woman.

Wollstonecraft shows that under the existing social system, women have virtually no means of becoming self-sufficient and self-supporting except, perhaps, through prostitution. Jemima, in order to subsist, works as a servant, becomes a kept mistress, and then a washerwoman. She comments on the "wretchedness of situation peculiar to [her] sex": "A man with half my industry, and, I may say, abilities, could have procured a decent livelihood, and discharged some of the duties which knit mankind together; whilst I, who had acquired a taste for the rational, ...the virtuous enjoyments of life, was cast aside as the filth of society" (115-6).

Jemima's story illustrates the stark realities of a life based on one's sexuality. Whereas in novels by male authors, such as Defoe's Moll Flanders and Roxana or Cleland's Fanny Hill, the mistresses of pleasure are depicted as enjoying their trades and gaining financial success, Wollstonecraft's narrative shows only the "wretchedness and depravity," the misery of a life based on the brutal appetites of man (109). Jemima tells Maria and another inmate, Henry Darnford: "I...yielded to the desires of the brutes I met, with...detestation....I have since read in novels of the blandishments of seduction, but I had not even the pleasure of being enticed into vice" (109).

As well as being sexually abused, Jemima is stricken with poverty. Willing to do the "most menial bodily labour," she still experiences difficulty in finding

employment because of her "tainted" reputation (114). Wollstonecraft does not believe that "poverty is no evil," as Hannah More in her Cheap Repository Tracts did (115).⁵ Darnford says that "though riches may fail to produce proportionate happiness, poverty most commonly excludes it, by shutting up all the avenues to improvement" (115). Maria cannot see what could possibly consist of the "peculiar happiness of indigence," believing it to be nothing but "brutal rest" (114). Poverty restricts and limits human capability: "The mind is necessarily imprisoned in its own little tenement;...The book of knowledge is closely clasped, against those who must fulfil their daily task of severe manual labour or die; and curiosity, rarely excited by thought or information, seldom moves on the stagnate lake of ignorance" (114). Jemima echoes this belief: "[the poor] have not time to reason or reflect to any extent, or minds sufficiently exercised to adopt the principles of action, which form perhaps the only basis of contentment in every station" (114-5).

Poovey feels that Wollstonecraft does not make full use of Jemima's tale. She writes:

Jemima's story--which is a radical, indeed feminist, story--has the potential to call into question both the organizational principles of bourgeois society and the sentimentalism that perpetuates romantic idealism. For the anarchy implicit in Jemima's brief assertion of female sexuality combines with the stark realism of the

narrative to explode the assumptions that tie female sexuality to romance and thus to the institutions men traditionally control. But Wollstonecraft does not develop the revolutionary implications of Jemima's narrative. Instead, her story is quickly, ostentatiously, suppressed (Lady, 104).

Against this criticism that Wollstonecraft was not willing to renounce the "bourgeois institution of marriage" and "the romantic expectations that motivate Maria" (104), I would argue that Wollstonecraft was writing a work of fiction, showing "things as they are." She was not proposing solutions to the problem here, nor was she writing of things as they ought to be. I would also argue that articulation is a form of action. Wollstonecraft, in writing her novel, in fact, exposes the serious limitations of traditionally male-controlled institutions.

Indeed, even in her Rights of Woman, Wollstonecraft never calls for the abolition of the institution of marriage. She only advocates change in the system of the education of girls in order that women may better fulfill their roles as wives and mothers. She says: "If marriage be the cement of society, mankind should all be educated after the same model, or the intercourse of the sexes will never deserve the name of fellowship, nor will women ever fulfil the peculiar duties of their sex, till they become enlightened citizens..."(Rights of Woman, 350).

Poovey's charge of Wollstonecraft's sentimentalism and

romantic expectations is more problematic. As we have seen in her early work, Mary, A Fiction, Wollstonecraft does not fully resolve the difficulty. Romantic idealism can disappoint, as Maria is ultimately neglected by her lover, Darnford, but it is also a source of joy and happiness, albeit temporarily. In the context of her other writings, we know that she does not think that women should rely solely on their sentiments. In Rights of Woman she warns girls against the kind of romantic expectations found in novels, saying that "women who have fostered a romantic unnatural delicacy of feeling, waste their lives in imagining how happy they should have been with a husband who could love them with a fervid increasing affection every day" (80). She also believes that women are "subjected by ignorance to their sensation" (387). Women are "amused by the reveries of the stupid novelists who work up tales," with "sentimental jargon," and "draw the heart aside from its daily duties" (387). As a novelist, she would not have wanted to perpetuate this tendency. Though Wollstonecraft does not end the novel with Jemima's desolate story, she does not finish it with the fulfillment of the heroine's romantic dreams either. As it stands, the Jemima digression serves as a strong reminder of "the oppressed state of women" (120).

Interiority Versus Appearance

Like the other writers of the 1790s, Wollstonecraft was torn between different values; that of the old and the new order, as she lived in what Michel Foucault calls the period of change from a classical to a modern episteme. For Foucault, the classical episteme is based on representation, where "words [are] allotted the task and the power of 'representing thought'" (78), while in modernity, words "rediscover[] their ancient, enigmatic density,....words become a text to be broken down, so as to allow that other meaning hidden in them to emerge and become clearly visible" (304).

In her novel, Wollstonecraft seems to be trying to come to terms with this change in the way of thinking. Both Maria and Jemima question the traditional meaning of not only words, but of actions and of appearances. John P. McGowan explains why there was a need to look behind appearances and actions at this time of transition from what he calls classical sense to romantic sensibility:

Classical 'sense' constituted a world in which things could be arranged spatially and visually. A thing's appearance and its place displayed its meaning. To know a thing, to locate its relation to other things, was to read what is presented to the eye. Socially, rank and dress functioned as

the spatial and visual demonstration of the individual's identity....Romantic 'sensibility'...escapes the senses, especially sight. The deeps of feeling, the hidden heart, remain a secret to the outside observer. A great gap opens up between appearances and the true meaning of a person or thing. The most important facts, the truly determining meanings, must be searched out, with little regard for how things appear. Where the classical world is characterized by clarity and light, the romantic world is mysterious and dark. (2-3)

In The Wrongs of Woman both Maria and Jemima place more importance on romantic interiority than on classical appearance. For Maria it is no longer enough just to play the role of the dutiful wife. In accepting Darnford "as her husband,...protector and eternal friend," she chooses to be truthful to self rather than to keep up false appearances to society (188).

Because she values honesty over public opinion, she is castigated by society. Wollstonecraft describes the circumstances with irony:

She visited some ladies with whom she had formerly been intimate, but was refused admittance and at the opera, or Ranelagh, they could not recollect her. Among these ladies there were some, not her most intimate acquaintance, who generally supposed to avail themselves of the

cloke of marriage, to conceal a mode of conduct, that would for ever have damned their fame, had they been innocent, seduced girls. (192)

Maria would rather suffer the consequences of being an outcast, rather than be forced to pretend to love a husband she did not respect. She disagrees with moralists who "insist that women ought to, and can love their husbands, because it is their duty" (153). For Maria as for Wollstonecraft, it is not enough that a woman yields to the ardour of her lover "out of sheer compassion, or to promote a frigid plan of future comfort" (153). According to Maria, these "good women, in the ordinary acceptation of the phrase," [sic] do not have those "finely fashioned nerves, which render the senses exquisite. They may possess tenderness; but they want that fire of the imagination, which produces active sensibility, and positive virtue" (153). Indeed, at one point she condemns "women [who] only submit in appearance, and forfeit their own respect to secure their reputation in the world" (157).

Jemima, on the other hand, discovers early that so called respectable people have the same "brutal appetite" as the wretches she meets on the streets (107). At sixteen, her master seduces her while his "family were at a methodist meeting" (106). Thereafter, she meets many other "gentlemen" who only appear to be of good character. These use her when they need her, but afterwards ignore her when she is in trouble. For example, a man who "was an advocate

for unequivocal sincerity; and had often...decanted on the evils which arise from society from the despotism of rank and riches" (113-4) would only lecture at Jemima on the "lot of man to submit to certain privations" instead of helping her when she was starving (114). Finally, weary of always being "branded with shame" (114), Jemima, out of respect for herself, renounces the life of prostitution and seeks the employment of the private asylum.

Though they are from different ranks of society, both women learn to question the meaning of words. What do words such as "love," "happiness," "virtue," "respect," "misery," "madness," mean in relation to an individual, in relation to society? By the end of the novel, Maria begins to believe that "we see what we wish, and make a world of our own--and, though reality may sometimes open a door to misery, yet the moments of happiness procured by the imagination, may, without a paradox, be reckoned among the solid comforts of life" (189).

Though unable to fully reconcile this division between appearance and one's sense of truth, Wollstonecraft does rely on her "imagination" to aid her. As a novelist, she shows her view that it is worthwhile to adhere to one's beliefs rather than give in to public opinion. Maria may have been unjustly condemned by the judge who decided on her case, but her life, as recorded in the memoirs to her daughter, is a testament of the strength of strong convictions. Jemima, too, in the narrating of her story,

Echoing Maria's Plight: Other Female Voices

Wollstonecraft uses repetition as a structural device. Maria is not the only tyrannized wife in the novel. Within her diegesis are voices of other narrators: the women she encounters tell her tales which echo her own. The weaving back and forth of the same tale reinforces Wollstonecraft's point: that the history of Maria's oppression is to be considered that of all women rather than that of an individual.

Early on in the novel Maria listens to the singing of "a lovely maniac, just brought into an adjoining chamber" (88). Maria is frightened by the woman's "unconnected exclamations" and "fits of laughter, so horrid," and finds out that the wretch "had been married, against her inclination, to a rich old man, extremely jealous...; and that, in consequence of his treatment, or something which hung on her mind, she had, during her first lying-in, lost her senses" (88). Though the story may seem melodramatic, it is similar to the short married life of Mary Wollstonecraft's sister, Eliza. Married in October 1782 to Meridith Bishop, Eliza had a child, and then suffered 'an acute post partum breakdown' (Wardle, 25, 26). Mary persuaded Eliza to run away from her husband, and the couple never reunited. In The Wrongs of Woman, the story serves as an example of the extent of psychological damage that can

result from parental greed and the use of a daughter as a commodity for exchange and for self-aggrandizement. In A Vindication of the Rights of Woman Wollstonecraft writes: "Parental affection, is, perhaps; the blindest modification of perverse self-love." It is "but a pretext to tyrannize where it can be done with impunity" (318-9). The story of the "poor maniac," a creature, who, unlike Maria, actually does go mad, is only one of the many variations, slightly intensified, of the heroine's plight.

Another story of woman's oppression is recounted to Maria when she seeks shelter from her husband. The lady who owns the haberdasher shop where Maria conceals herself does not believe that Maria can ever get away, because "when a woman was once married, she must bear everything" (170). Maria observes that "Her pale face, on which appeared a thousand haggard lines and delving wrinkles, produced by what is emphatically termed fretting, inforced her remark...She toiled from morning till night; yet her husband would rob the till, and take away the money reserved for paying bills; and, returning home drunk, he would beat her if she chanced to offend him, though she had a child at the breast" (170-171). Despite this maltreatment, the woman still considered "her dear Johnny" to be "her master" (171). Maria compares the "despotic" rule of the woman to a "slave in the West Indies" (171).

There are many similarities between the haberdasher lady and Maria's narrative. Like the despotic ruler, Mr.

Venables, Maria's husband, extorts large sums of money from Maria for his gambling debts. Like Johnny, Mr. Venables is a habitual drinker and meets Maria regularly at the breakfast table with a "squalid appearance," a squeamish stomach "produced by the last night's intemperance" (147). Her description of Mr. Venables, "lolling in an arm-chair, in a dirty powdering gown, soiled linen, ungartered stockings, and tangled hair, yawning and stretching himself" (147), is reminiscent of the second plate of Hogarth's Marriage à la Mode (Kelly, 225, n.1). Like the satiric painter, Wollstonecraft sees through bourgeois gentility and customs, depicting the sordid, seamy aspects of fashionable marriages.

The story of the haberdasher lady, then, is a microcosm, a mise-en-abyme, of the central issues of the novel. The compressed narrative, the tale within the tale, reinforces, restates, and echoes the heroine's plight. Lest her readers think that Maria's story is unusual, Wollstonecraft deliberately repeats the same problems over and over with various female characters. Though she uses the basic form of a sentimental novel, Wollstonecraft restructures the genre to suit the purposes of her didacticism. Not one of the narratives in The Wrongs of Woman ends with the traditional fairy tale-like ending. All show the restrictive predicament of women under society's legal system.

Maria hears of yet another tale of female oppression

when she once more searches for new lodgings. This landlady, like the haberdasher lady, has accepted the situation and can only reiterate the traditional maxims taught to women: "Women must be submissive,...Indeed what could most women do? Who had they to maintain them, but their husbands?" (176-7). Her story illustrates the problems of women and the property laws: a married woman's property was virtually at her husband's disposal (Kelly, 228). She tells Maria of how "she had been used in the world": She had saved a little money in service, and then was "over-persuaded...to marry ...a footman" (177). She continues:

My husband got acquainted with an impudent slut, who chose to live on other people's means--and then all went to rack and ruin. He ran in debt to buy her fine clothes,...and...signed an execution on my very goods, bought with the money I worked so hard to get; and they came and took my bed from under me....

I sought for a service again...but he used to follow me, and kick up such a riot when he was drunk, that I could not keep a place; nay, he even stole my clothes, and pawned them; and when I went to the pawnbroker's,...they said, 'It was all as one, my husband had a right to whatever I had.' (177)

The story goes on much as before: her husband strips her of

her goods, leaves her when "there was nothing more to be had," and then comes back again after she establishes herself somewhere else (178). As the intradiegetic listener, Maria's reaction to the tale: "Why should I dwell on similar incidents" (178) signals to the readers the appropriate response to the text. We are meant to see, and draw our own conclusions from the similarities between the landlady's story and Maria's narrative. Their social situations may be different, but as women they face the same kind of problem. For this reason, Maria concludes that when one is "born a woman," one is "born to suffer" (181). In the memoirs addressed to her daughter she writes that "I feel...acutely the various ills my sex are fated to bear--I feel that the evils they are subject to endure degrade them so far below their oppressors, as almost to justify their tyranny; leading at the same time superficial reasoners to term that weakness the cause, which is only the consequence of short-sighted despotism" (181).

Resisting the Sentimental End

Though the Wrongs of Woman is unfinished, the short hints gathered by Godwin "respecting the plan of the remainder of the work" show that Wollstonecraft rejected the happily-ever-after conclusion prevalent in the sentimental novels of the day (200). Darnford, the sensitive prison inmate possessing a "bewitching frankness of nature" (93), who shares Maria's passion for Rousseau, would have been an ideal lover and hero figure for Maria. The novel could have ended with their happy union. But, as Poovey puts it, Wollstonecraft fears that "the products of the creative imagination...will have the effects on readers that Rousseau's Julie has on Maria: engaging their readers' imaginations, fictions disengage those readers from life, eliciting imaginative identification, they feed wishful fantasies instead of initiating political action" ("Gender," 120). What Wollstonecraft wants from her readers is indignation and reaction, not romantic, vicarious pleasure.

Hence, The Wrongs of Woman culminates in an ardent but articulate plea for the rights of the female sex. First, Maria decries the institution of marriage and the laws which "force women...to sign a contract, which renders them dependent on the caprice of the tyrant, whom choice or necessity has appointed to reign over them" (195). Secondly, Maria argues for the right of a wife who leaves her husband

to be treated as a human being and not a criminal: "she must be allowed to consult her conscience, and regulate her conduct, in some degree, by her own sense of right" (197).

Maria claims "a divorce, and the liberty of enjoying, free from molestation, [her] fortune" (198).

The judge dismisses Maria's claims as "French principles" and as an excuse for infidelity (199). He felt, as Dr. Gregory did in his A Father's Legacy to his Daughters, that a "virtuous woman" should have no thought of her feelings, as "it was her duty to love and obey the man chosen by her parents and relations" (199). Aside from reforms in property laws and laws regarding marriages, what Wollstonecraft is arguing for here is the right of a woman to be honest, to present her true self to her society, instead of, as most women do, "practising insincerity," and intrigues (192).

Wollstonecraft shows that society has come to a point where there is no longer a one to one relation between language and being, that words do not necessarily mean what they appear to represent. There is a schism, in Saussurian terms, between the signifier and the signified. In this case, Maria questions the meaning of the word 'honour': "If, instead of openly living with her lover, she could have condescended to call into play a thousand arts, which, degrading in her own mind, might have allowed the people who were not deceived, to pretend to be so, she would have been caressed and treated like an honourable woman. 'And Brutus

is an honourable man!' said Mark-Antony with equal sincerity" (192). The importance attached to a woman's superficial reputation had been attacked by Wollstonecraft in the Rights of Woman. In this earlier work she says that so much stress on "behaviour and outward observances...only produce a kind of insipid decency" in women (282-3).

In Foucault's terms, Wollstonecraft is contending with the classical system of judgement by outward appearances and the modern system of romantic, individual intuition of truth. In the Rights of Woman she repudiates the notion that "respect for the opinion of the world... [is] the principal duty of woman" (283). She disagrees with Rousseau, whom she quotes as saying: 'A man...secure in his own good conduct; depends only on himself, and may brave the public opinion; but a woman, in behaving well, performs but half her duty, as what is thought of her, is as important to her as what she really is' (283). For Wollstonecraft, "this regard for reputation" is "the grand source of female depravity" (283).

In The Wrongs of Woman, Maria's valorization of the feelings of her heart over her reputation does not bring her "uninterrupted felicity," but it does bring her much happiness: "The real affections of life, when they are allowed to burst forth, are buds pregnant with joy and all the sweet emotions of the soul; yet they branch out with wild ease, unlike the artificial forms of felicity" (192-3). The conclusion of the novel, though in outline form,

suggests that after this period of romance, Darnford proves unfaithful, and that Maria subsequently attempts suicide. Darnford, though the "most tender, sympathizing creature in the world" had a "volatility in his manner" (192), unlike Rousseau's St. Preux, the "demi-god of [Maria's] fancy"(89). As Poovey suggests, the narrator's ironic description of Maria's emotional surrender to him shows the "shrewd awareness that 'romantic expectations' often do not correspond to real possibilities" (Poovey, Lady, 97). Wollstonecraft does not want Maria to leave one man only to run into the arms of another because she realizes that because of the way things are, it is almost inevitable that history will repeat itself.

By not allowing Maria to live out her romantic idealism, Wollstonecraft keeps her narrative from disintegrating into another sentimental novel with a comic end. Her dialectical novel is meant to show the problems inherent in the institution of marriage, and the injustice of the legal system to women. A romantic ending would be artistically pleasing, but would be ineffectual, politically and ideologically. Her fiction was not written to provide insubstantial solutions to the emotional yearnings of her female readers; therefore, she resists artificial resolutions and aesthetic closures. Instead, the Wrongs of Woman ends where it had begun, in the midst of troubles and thwarted prospects. Unfinished, it incites its readers to action, and challenges them to devise solutions to essential social problems.

Notes to Chapter I

¹ See, for example, the biographies by Ralph M. Wardle, Eleanor Flexner, Claire Tomalin and Emily Sunstein.

² In his Author's Preface Richardson says that Clarissa "is proposed as an examplar to her sex" (I, xiv).

³ Kathryn Allen Rabuzzi, in The Sacred and the Feminine: Toward a Theology of Housework (New York: Seabury, 1982), talks about the "static waiting pattern" of women as a "mode of being." As quoted by Josephine Donovan, "Toward a Women's Poetics", Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature III. 1-2 (1984): 102.

⁴ Though primarily about the nineteenth-century woman writer, Gilbert and Gubar's observations about madness and imprisonment could equally apply to Wollstonecraft. In The Madwoman in the Attic Gilbert and Gubar argue that "dramatizations of imprisonment and escape...represent a uniquely female tradition in this period"(85). They believe that though nineteenth-century male writers also "used imagery of enclosure and escape," women authors "reflect the literal reality of their own confinement in the constraints they depict....women seem forced to live more intimately with the metaphors they have created" (86-87).

⁵ Gary Kelly points out that Wollstonecraft is probably referring to the controversy surrounding Pitt's attempt to reform the Poor Laws in 1796-7, 221n.

Chapter II

MARY HAYS

Mary Hays (1760-1843), a woman intellectual far ahead of her contemporaries, is remembered more for her notorious, and largely unjust, reputation than for her literary efforts. In a letter to Robert Southey dated Sat. 25. 1800-Jan., an irascible Samuel Taylor Coleridge writes: "Of Miss Hay's intellect I do not think so highly, as you, or rather, to speak sincerely, I think, not contemptuously, but certainly very despectively thereof.--Yet I think you likely in this case to have judged better than I--for to hear a Thing, ugly & petticoated, ex-syllogize a God with cold-blooded Precision, & attempt to run Religion thro' the body with an Icicle...I do not endure it!" (Letters, 563). Hays was the subject of several caricatures in fiction at the end of the century. In Charles Lloyd's Edmund Oliver (1798) which satirizes Coleridge and the English Jacobins, Hays appears as Lady Gertrude Sinclair. In addition, a cruel portrait of Hays exists in the character called Bridgetina Botherim, the heroine of Elizabeth Hamilton's Memoirs of Modern Philosophers (1800), a novel which mocks those "who read the novels and metaphysics of the school of Rousseau and Godwin and absorb their doctrines" (Moler, 202). Hays is also included in the "blasphemous band" of

Wollstonecraftians who were attacked by the Reverend Richard Polwhele's The Unsex'd Females (1798).

Hays must have had an extraordinary personality or must have had very unorthodox ideas to have created such a sensation in her time. As a matter of fact, she did possess both these qualities. Like Wollstonecraft, she was a rebel and associated with revolutionary thinkers: Rational Dissenters such as Joseph Priestley, Theophilus Lindsey, John Disney; and later the circle of intellectuals who met at Joseph Johnson's home, including Thomas Paine, Thomas Holcroft, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft. With them she shared the "new philosophy," believing in ideals such as the common ownership of property, absolute personal equality, the ultimate perfectibility of human nature, and the freedom from the restraint of marriage (Luria, Biography, 249). With these novel notions, it is no wonder that she provoked hostile reactions.

Hays' most controversial works were written in the 1790s: Cursory Remarks on an Enquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public or Social Worship (1791), Letters and Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous (1793), Memoirs of Emma Courtney (1796), An Appeal to Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women (1798), and The Victim of Prejudice (1799).

Saddened by the death of her friend, Mary Wollstonecraft, in 1797, and wounded by Charles Lloyd's vicious slandering of her in their London circle, Hays led a less public life as

the century drew to a close. After 1800 Hays became more subdued even in her writings. Though she wrote a good deal, her works are less polemical, less explicitly contentiously feminist than her earlier ones. In 1803, she published Female Biography; or Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women of all Ages and Countries, Alphabetically arranged; in 1804, she reworked Henry Brooke's educational novel into Harry Clinton; or a tale of Youth; in 1808, The Fool of Quality; Historical Dialogues for Young Persons; The Brothers in 1815; Family Annals; or the Sisters in 1817; and Memoirs of Queens in 1821.

i. Memoirs of Emma Courtney

In an article on novel writing published in the Monthly Magazine of September 1797, Mary Hays, in defense of her work, expresses her criterion for good novels. She says that novels should arouse and instill rather than dictate, and disagrees with Samuel Johnson, who, in his Rambler essay of March 31, 1750, "On Modern Fiction," thought that characters in novels should be exemplary models. He believed that for the sake of the young, who read books as "lectures of conduct", "the best examples only should be exhibited (22). For Hays, a good novel ought to serve the purposes of truth and philosophy, but it does not necessarily have to be moralistic. A novel's object is "to describe life and manners in real or probable situations, to delineate the human mind in endless varieties, to develop the heart, to paint the passions, to trace the springs of action, to interest the imagination, exercise the affections, and awaken the powers of the mind."¹ She judges a novel excellent if the author attentively observes mankind, exhibits acute discernment, exquisite moral sensibility and shows an intimate acquaintance with human passions and powers.

Hays' first novel, Memoirs of Emma Courtney (1796), made her "something of an authority on the contemporary novel" (Luria, "Introduction," Emma Courtney, I, 11). It

exemplifies many of her ideas about novel writing, and, in particular, it shows how a novel could be used to illustrate a "truth" or a "philosophy." In the Preface, Hays reiterates her belief that "the most interesting, and the most useful, fictions, are" ones that "delineat[e] the progress, and trac[e] the consequences, of one strong, indulged, passion, or prejudice," as they "afford materials, by which the philosopher may calculate the powers of the human mind, and learn the springs which set it in motion" (I, 5). The subject of Emma Courtney is excessive sensibility or over-indulged feeling, a sentiment which Hays sees as "hackneyed in this species of composition, consequently more difficult to treat with any degree of originality" (I, 6). Yet the novel enjoyed a certain amount of success in its time. The review of Emma Courtney in the Monthly Magazine of January 1797 reads: "Miss Hays' Emma Courtney, written to show the danger of indulging extreme sensibility, is an interesting and instructive performance abounding with just and liberal sentiments, and evidently the production of a well-cultivated and enlightened mind" (III, 47).

Hays tells her readers that her heroine is not an ideal; instead, she is "a human being, loving virtue while enslaved by passion, liable to the mistakes and weaknesses of our fragile nature" (I, 8). She says that Emma's errors are "the offspring of sensibility; and that the result of her hazardous experiment is calculated to operate as a

warning, rather than an example" (I, 8). The form of fictional memoirs or autobiography forces the writer to look over the events of her past, evaluate and reassess them in the light of the present, and come to some coherent explanation of how her life came to be the way it is. Unlike a novel in the form of a "history," the temporal structure of the fictional memoirs involves the ordering, decoding and reworking of experience, real or imaginary. In this semi-autobiographical work, Hays traces Emma's life from her early childhood, accepting the Godwinian notion that "the characters of men originate in their external circumstances" (Political Justice, 27). Hays, like Wollstonecraft, believes that one is a product of one's external circumstances, and that recognition and identification of the situations which cause one's emotions or habits are the first steps toward one's amelioration. She quotes the French philosopher Helvetius: "Understanding, and talents, [are] nothing more, in men, than the produce of their desires, and particular situations" (I, 5).

The memoirs are addressed to the young Augustus Harley, the son of the Augustus with whom Emma falls in love. Though we do not see much of his reactions to the memoirs, he functions as a kind of intradiegetic reader, or reader within the text. Emma recounts her life in the hope of preventing him from making the same mistakes that she did. She tells him: "I have unfolded the errors of my past life--I have traced them to their source--I have laid bare

my mind before you, that the experiments which have been made upon it may be beneficial to yours!" (II, 217-218). The five carefully embedded letters--two at the beginning of the novel, one in the middle, and two at the end--constitute a moral frame through which the reader views Emma's tale of excessive feeling and uncontrolled passion. By so placing the letters, Hays never lets the reader forget that Emma's rather chaotic and frenzied tale of passion is subordinate to the sober lessons it teaches, first to Emma, then to Augustus, and Hays hoped, at last to the reader. Though passion prevails in the bulk of the novel, reason and good sense begin and end it. Hays, then, attempts to "paint the passions, to trace the springs of action...and awaken the powers of the mind," as she believed novels should do.

The opening letters to young Augustus contain the essential "truth" or purpose of the novel. Emma counsels her adopted "son" with the words: "Exercise your understanding; think freely, investigate every opinion, disdain the rust of antiquity, raise systems, invent hypotheses, and, by the absurdities they involve, seize on the clue of truth. Rouse the nobler energies of your mind; be not the slave of your passions, neither dream of eradicating them" (I, 4). These are the precepts by which Emma has learned to live. In her own case, she has arrived "at truth through many painful mistakes and consequent sufferings" (I, 6). She therefore urges both the fictional reader, Augustus, and the real readers of the memoirs to

"learn, then, from the incidents of my life...a more striking and affecting lesson than abstract philosophy can ever afford" (I, 6-7).

The Dangerous Prevalence of Imagination

To indulge the power of fiction, and send imagination out upon the wing, is often the sport of those who delight too much in silent speculation.

Samuel Johnson. Rasselas

In Memoirs of Emma Courtney Hays reiterates Godwin's doctrine of philosophic necessity which is based on the Locke-Hartley tradition²: "Every man is born with sensation, with the aptitude of receiving impressions; the force of those impressions depends on a thousand circumstances, over which he has little power; these circumstances form the mind, and determine the future character. We are all the creatures of education..." (I, 4). When Emma reviews the events of her life, "they convince [her] of the irresistible power of circumstances, modifying and controuling our characters, and introducing, mechanically, those associations and habits which make us what we are; for without outward impressions we should be nothing" (I, 7).

Two of the most important factors which shape Emma's life and make her do the things she does are her solitary habits and her love of reading. Indeed, Emma Courtney is very much a tale about the Johnsonian fear of the poetic fancy or imagination. Hays, like Johnson, cautions her readers against the predominance of imagination over reason,

especially in individuals who spend much time in solitude. The epigraph of the novel is a quotation from Rousseau about seclusion: "The perceptions of persons in retirement are very different from those of people in the great world: their passions, being differently modified, are differently expressed; their imaginations, constantly impressed by the same objects, are more violently affected..." Emma grows up more fond of books than anything else. As her mother died at childbirth, Emma is left to the care of an aunt and an uncle, both avid readers. Mrs. Melmoth "had great sensibility,...and a refined and romantic manner of thinking, acquired from the perusal of the old romances," while Mr. Melmoth, while not exactly resembling "an Orlando, or an Oroondates,...was fond of reading," and "was a tolerable proficient in the belles lettres, and could, on occasion, quote Shakespeare, scribble poetry, and even philosophize with Pope and Bolingbroke" (I, 11).

Influenced by her indulgent guardians, Emma becomes fascinated with books and their ability to excite emotion. When her aunt relates stories from the "Arabian Nights, Turkish Tales, and other works of like marvellous import," Emma listens with "ever new delight" (I, 16). She says: "the more they excited vivid emotions, the more wonderful they were, the greater was my transport: they became my favourite amusement, and produced, in my young mind, a strong desire of learning to read the books which contained such enchanting stories of entertainment" (I, 16-17). At

six, Emma "read aloud before company,...learned to recite verses," and began to think herself "a wonderful scholar" (I, 17).

Like many children, Emma tries to make fiction into reality through play acting: "In my sports with my companions, I acted over what I had read: I was alternately the valiant knight--the gentle damsel--the adventurous mariner--the daring robber--the courteous lover--and the airy coquet" (I, 18). But her obsession with the imaginative world seems unusually powerful: "Stories were still my passion, and I sighed for a romance that would never end" (I, 18). After the death of her uncle, Emma consoles herself by reading. She subscribes to a circulating library, and, without much attention to selection, devours "ten to fourteen novels in a week" (I, 26).

When her father finally decides to take an interest in her, he soon discovers that her "imagination had been left to wander unrestrained in the fairy fields of fiction" (I, 31). He tells her: "your fancy requires a rein rather than a spur. Your studies, for the future, must be of a soberer nature, or I shall have you mistake my valet for a prince in disguise, my house for a haunted castle, and my rational care for your future welfare for barbarous tyranny" (I, 32). Ironically, not long after Emma becomes an orphan, she neglects to follow the advice of her guardians, and lets the "illusions of imagination" take over (I, 45).

Transgressing the Boundaries of the Romance

With her knowledge gleaned from her fanciful reading and with very little first-hand experience of the real world, Emma, at age nineteen, is given a "small pittance" of a thousand pounds as her inheritance, and is left to fend for herself (I, 54). As a poor, naive orphan, Emma bears a close resemblance to the heroines of conventional romance,³ but unlike them she does not go on to meet and marry the man of her dreams. Instead Hays uses Emma to show the sort of problems that beset an intelligent, young woman of the time. Hays' novel, like her essays and other publications, argues that change is needed in the education of young girls if they are to become reasonable beings and useful members of the community. Emma Courtney is an illustration of the negative results of the existing system.

Not wishing to create another sentimental romance, yet intending to reach the genre's largely female audience, Hays uses the form but does not follow its more or less prescribed formula. She does not let Emma's beauty and charm lead her to nuptial bliss and everlasting love. Instead, she deconstructs the fantasy of the fiction by showing the opportunistic, materialistic way of the real world. Early on in the novel, Mr. Courtney advises Emma not to "trust" marriage at the moment, as "in the existing state of things, [marriage] must of necessity be an affair of

finance....mere merit, wit, or beauty, stand in need of more powerful auxiliaries" (I, 51). In the course of the book, Emma learns that the ideals of the fictional world--matrimonial bliss, friendship, sincerity, virtue--have significantly different meanings in the contemporary social world.

Two small incidents quickly initiate the sentimental Emma into the customs and the way of thinking of worldly society. At the Mortons, her relations with whom she is to stay, Emma offers to instruct the children "in the rudiments either of music, drawing, French, or any other accomplishment" (I, 62). This desire to be of some "active and useful employment" is misconstrued by Mrs. Morton as "vanity" on Emma's part (I, 62,63). Mrs. Morton desires no "interference" in such an "important task" (I, 63). Similarly, her friendship with the philosopher Mr. Francis is mistaken for "partial" sentiments (I, 78). Because Emma enjoys Mr. Francis' company and conversation more than other people's, she is censured. Mr. Morton says: "You are but little acquainted, Emma, with the customs of society; there is a great indecorum in a young lady's making these distinctions" (I, 78). In dealing with society, it is not enough that one's intentions are pure and sincere; one has to follow that society's rules and fashions.

Through Emma's naivety, Hays shows some of the problems encountered by one unfamiliar with the socially understood, but unwritten codes. As a girl nurtured from youth by



novels and romances, Emma begins to see discrepancies between the ideals found in books and the practices of the real world. She questions the system of values which underlies the society of the late eighteenth century. The romantic Emma, who is "accustomed to speak and act from [her] convictions," and is "little solicitous respecting the opinion of others" (I, 68), must learn to live in a society in which what Foucault calls "classical" values--where a thing's appearance and its place displayed meaning--still prevail. Like Wollstonecraft's works of fiction, Hays' novel shows the difficulties of living and adjusting to society's artificial standards.

Emma's most daring venture and, in the end, her biggest blunder, is the open acknowledgement of her love for Augustus Harley. Again, this mistake stems from her romantic notions of love and passion and the fact that she values sincerity over the "rules sanctioned by usage, by prejudice, by expediency" (I, 156-7). Susceptible to fantasy, Emma falls in love with an ideal rather than a man. Before she meets Augustus, she confesses warm feelings for him because of her strong friendship with his mother: "Cut off from the society of mankind, and unable to expound my sensations, all the strong affections of my soul seemed concentrated to a single point. Without being conscious of it myself, my grateful love for Mrs. Harley had, already, by a transition easy to be traced by a philosophic mind, transferred itself to her son. He was the St. Preux, the

Emilius, of my sleeping and waking reveries." (I, 113).

This passion, bordering on excessive, originates very much from Emma's reading and her romantic notions. Earlier, Emma had been transported by the "Héloïse of Rousseau," seeing it as a "dangerous, enchanting, work" (I, 41). The French novel, also about the conflicts of reason and passion, is an interesting intertext of Emma Courtney. Emma, like Héloïse, is willing to give herself up wholly to a man who is not her husband. Emma, and perhaps Hays, is excited by the idea of love which involves an active participation on the woman's part. Hays' novel explores and articulates a woman's passion and sexuality in a relationship which is not the one sanctioned by society. Hays develops her novel around Emma's strong emotions--a single woman's yearning for a man who has expressed nothing but friendship for her--outside of marriage, in a love which transgresses society's norms and codes. On reading Rousseau, Emma feels "pleasure [which] approached the limits of pain" (I, 41). She says: "it was tumult--all the ardour of my character was excited" (I, 41). Rousseau's novel, like Emma's story, is about a kind of forbidden love, an attachment verging on adultery.⁴

Both Rousseau's Héloïse and Hays' Emma admire men who, for them, embody knowledge and learning. Just as Héloïse falls in love with her tutor, Emma is infatuated with her "preceptor," the man who aids her in the learning of "astronomy and philosophy...languages," "a general knowledge

of the principles, and philosophy, of criticism and grammar, and of the rules of composition" (I, 139). Together they acquire "new truth," and enjoy music, drawing, conversation and reading belles lettres (I, 139). Emma describes their relationship as "the feast of reason, and the flow of souls" (I, 139). This adoration of the teacher figure, according to Ellen Moers in Literary Women, is the "feminist's fantasy of perfect love--foolish perhaps, but the result of pride rather than humility. The heroine...is ambitious. She intends to improve herself spiritually by association with the superior male" (157).

Emma, then, is unlike other heroines in the novels of the eighteenth century. She is a woman who desires to explore and acquire the things which men usually possess, what Gina Luria calls the "twin sources of masculine power: knowledge and sex" (Biography, 297). Emma's reading has not only enriched her mind, but also made her aware of her sexuality, as she says at one point, "I am neither a philosopher, nor a heroine--but a woman, to whom education has given a sexual character" (II, 53). Hays' novel shows the frustrations of an enlightened woman, of one who has "risen superior to the generality of [the] oppressed sex" (II, 53). Instead of being able to use the powers that she does acquire, Emma can only lament the "customs of society" which have "enslaved, enervated, and degraded woman" (I, 71).

Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women

One of the most important "truths" which Hays stresses in Emma Courtney is the unjust limitation of women's capabilities. In her novel and her feminist tracts, Letters and Essays, Moral and Miscellaneous (1793); and Appeal to the Men of Great Britain in Behalf of Women (1798), Hays reiterates her opinion that women suffer from a kind of mental bondage. Like Wollstonecraft, who also uses prison metaphors to show this subjugation, Hays says that the "female mind" is "enslaved," and believes that "the understandings of women have been chained down to frivolity and trifles" (Essays, 20).

In Letters and Essays Hays quotes George Dyer who says that "The truth is, the modes of education, and the customs of society are degrading to the female character, and the tyranny of custom is sometimes worse than the tyranny of government" (11). In Emma Courtney this idea is illustrated when the orphaned Emma finds that "the small pittance bequeathed to [her] was insufficient to preserve [her] from dependence" (I, 54). While her mind "panted for freedom, for social intercourse, for scenes in motion," the customs of society, her situation as a fortuneless, single woman did not allow these possibilities (I, 54). Emma exclaims: "Cruel prejudices!...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...Why do we suffer ourselves to be confined within a magic circle, without daring, by a magnanimous effort, to dissolve the barbarous spell?" (I, 55). Though Emma, unlike Wollstonecraft's Jemima, is educated and comes from an upper class family, when searching for a means of subsistence, her plight is the same as any other woman's. Her complaint echoes Jemima's in The Wrongs of Woman: "Active, industrious, willing to employ my faculties in any way, by which I might procure an honest independence, I beheld no path open to me, but that to which my spirit could not submit--the degradation of servitude" (II, 148-9). Hays's novel, like Wollstonecraft's, is an appeal and a call for reform on behalf of women.

Hays, like Wollstonecraft, recognizes that the customs of society, did not give women a chance to develop their talents and skills. She believes in opening up more trades and occupations to women, as they were capable of doing much more than they were traditionally allowed. In Letters and Essays she writes, "It is time for degraded woman to assert her right to reason...The frivolity and voluptuousness, which they have hitherto been educated, have had a large share in the general corruption of manners; this frivolity the sensible vindicator of our rights justly attributes to the entire dependence, in which we are trained. Young women

without fortunes, if they do not chance to marry...have scarce any other resource than in servitude, or prostitution. I never see, without indignation, those trades, which ought to be appropriated to women, almost entirely engrossed by men, haberdashery, millinery, and even mantua-making" (84-5). Had Emma been given the chance to employ herself in a useful manner, she would not have been so much at the mercy of the men she encounters.

In Hays' opinion, the restrictions on women result in the unhealthy fostering of their sensibility, emotionality and dependency. Emma finds that the "necessary avocations of [her] sex," the "insipid routine of heartless, mindless, intercourse...the childish vanity of varying external ornaments" are insufficient to engross, to satisfy, the active, aspiring mind" (I, 168). She feels that "while men pursue interest, honor, pleasure, as accords with their several dispositions, women, who have too much delicacy, sense, and spirit to degrade themselves by the vilest of all interchanges, remain insulated beings, and must be content tamely to look on, without taking any part in the great though often absurd and tragical, drama of life. Hence the eccentricities of conduct, with which women of superior minds have been accused--the struggles...of an ardent spirit, denied a scope for its exertions! The strong feelings, and strong energies...forced back, and pent up, ravage and destroy the mind which gave them birth!" (I, 169). This struggle of pent-up emotions, caused by social

restrictions as well as her isolation and her reading, is precisely what Emma experiences in the novel. Hays' depiction of Emma's foolish, excessive love for Augustus is meant to illustrate the consequences of the unnatural confinement and limitation of woman.

In her Appeal to the Men of Great Britain Hays restates this problem. She feels that ambition, "this passion to distinguish,...this rage to excel," is laudable in man, but "when applied to woman it commonly receives the denomination of vanity, or at best of pride" (77). Thus, women are "compelled...to adopt a conduct they cannot approve of, nor feel easy and natural; and are restrained...from the exercise of one more congenial to the rights of human nature" (78). Women are "Driven and excluded from what are commonly esteemed the consequential offices of life; denied...any political existence; and literary talents and acquirements...regarded rather with contempt or jealousy, than meeting with encouragement and applause;" there is "nothing...left for them, but domestic duties, and superficial accomplishments and vanities." It is not surprising that they lay "aside dull precept" and "give loose rein to their passions, and plunge headlong into folly and dissipation" (82). Hays analyzes women's situation in order to understand and so alter their behaviour. In attempting to examine the circumstances that control and make us what we are, she shows her belief in the possibilities of change and of reform.

Excess as Rebellion

Gina Luria observes that Emma is an "antithesis of Clarissa Harlowe. In terms of her personal ethos, chastity is as philosophically irrelevant as the ties of blood and the privileges of rank and wealth" ("Biography," 291). Compared to the novels of the early part of the century, Emma Courtney is indeed revolutionary and different in a number of ways. Though still a kind of romance, the work subverts many conventions of the genre. For example, the heroine does not end up marrying the man she adores, but someone else, an inferior suitor. Purity in the novel is defined in terms of sincerity of intentions, as opposed to sexual chastity on the woman's part. Structurally, the novel does not follow a linear progression, but moves in a circular or spiral course. The same issues are repeated over and over to stress their urgency and importance. Emma is a heroine of the new order: educated, intelligent, outspoken, and passionate. Hays uses her novel, with its excesses, its strong contradictions and innovations, to make a statement, to show that a change, a reorganization, is needed at society's most basic level.

For people such as Coleridge, Elizabeth Hamilton, and the Reverend Richard Polwhele, such a reformation of manners was unwelcome and troublesome. What they objected to and ridiculed most in Hays and in the novel was the combination of learning and love in a woman. For Emma

possessed both knowledge and sexuality, and was not the least bit afraid nor hesitant about using them. When she realizes her feelings for Augustus, she writes him many passionate, eloquent letters, expressing her true sentiments for him. She "makes no apologies for" her affection, because she says, "An attachment sanctioned by nature, reason and virtue; ennobles the mind capable of conceiving and cherishing it: of such an attachment a corrupt heart is utterly incapable" (I, 161). Again and again she demands to be recognized as a thinking and feeling woman: "I am not ashamed of being a human being; nor blush to own myself liable to 'the shakes and agues of his fragile nature.' I have ever spoken, and acted, from the genuine dictates of a mind swayed, at the time, by its own views and propensities" (II, 13). Because Augustus' benefactor will not allow Augustus to marry without losing his legacy, Emma even offers herself to her beloved without the bonds of matrimony: she is willing to let her affection triumph" over [her] prudence" (II, 65).

What Hays succeeded in doing in Emma Courtney was, in part, to break down, to blur, the artificial distinctions of gender differentiation constructed by society. The shocking thing about Emma's propositions stems from the fact that she is a woman. A Lovelace would not have been condemned for expressing his adoration of a lady, nor for his willingness to have an amorous affair with her. Hays' novel created an outrage because she, in fact, used the sentimental novel to

transgress the boundaries allocated to women by the male-dominated culture. In real life as well as in fiction, a woman's feelings about love and sex were allowed and would have been discussed only within the restrictive institution of the patriarchal home and family. Hays infringed on the male right to courtship and selection, in her own infatuated pursuit of William Frennd⁵ and in her fictional rendition of the relationship in Emma Courtney.

That Emma herself was aware of her excess is evident in her letters. She acknowledges that she has "indulged too long the wild and extravagant chimeras of a romantic imagination" (I, 180). She pleads with Augustus to respond to her avowals of affection. She says: "My sensibility, originally acute, from having been too much exercised, has become nearly morbid, and has almost unfitted me for an inhabitant of the world" (II, 30). She reminds him that her devotion is an exceptional one: "you have rejected an attachment originating in the highest, the purest, principles--you have thrown from you a heart of exquisite sensibility" (II, 31). While Emma realizes that this excessive feeling is not typical or acceptable behaviour in society, she nonetheless continues to indulge in her extravagant passion. For her, it was a way of rebelling against control and against established customs. Nourishing her ardor became a means of defiance, a triumphant manifestation of her refusal to submit to restraints imposed by man.

Ending: The Triumph of Moderation and Reason

By the end of the novel, Emma comes to realize the folly of her passion. She finds out that Augustus is already secretly married to another, and that she had been "unconsciously, and perseveringly" trying to "seduce the affections of a husband from his wife" (II, 91). This realization is accompanied by a reformation of manners on Emma's part. Once and for all, her sense triumphs over her sensibility. She blames Augustus for not telling her the whole truth earlier, because she says: "virtue [is] but a calculation of the consequences of our actions....Virtue can exist only in a mind capable of taking comprehensive views. How criminal, then, is ignorance" (II, 91-2). She would not have so conducted herself had she known the facts.

Like Wollstonecraft, Hays is of the opinion that a woman's ignorance is the cause of much unhappiness and wrongdoing. In her heroine's case, the ignorance stems from a lack of information. But in most other instances, woman's incapacity for judicious and prudent action results from her imperfect education. In Letters and Essays she points out that "Coercive measures may have a restraining effect for a time, but can never subdue an untractable spirit: it is only by engaging the affections, and enlarging the understanding, that the heart can be meliorated or principles be formed" (68). She sees virtue as active and

not merely "the absence of gross vice" (81). It is "sense, and spirit with humanity, and must be the result of reflection, and fixed principle" (81). In writing Emma Courtney she intends her readers to be moved to reason and virtue not through didactic preaching, but through a development of their sympathy and understanding.

After her experience, Emma tries to live her life according to reason and moderation rather than passion. She strengthens her mind, exercises her understanding, and renders herself serviceable to her husband in order to still "the importunate suggestions of a heart too exquisitely sensible" (II, 161). She realizes that her "first attachment was the morbid excess of a distempered imagination" (II, 163) and says that "we are guilty of vice and selfishness when we yield ourselves up to unbounded desires, and suffer our hearts to be wholly absorbed by one object, however meritorious that object may be" (II, 164).

Her brief departure from a life governed completely by reason occurs when chance throws the beloved Augustus in her way once more. Augustus' revelation that he did love her causes much tumult and emotion in Emma, so much so that "in [her] delirium [she] had incessantly" called upon his name (II, 187). But her sensibility no longer rules her actions. She recovers from her illness and is able to perform her duties as a wife and mother. In fact, this time, it is her husband, Montague, who gives in and acts according to his jealousy and passion. His melodramatic conduct towards

Emma, towards the servant girl, Rachel, whom he seduced, the killing of the infant and his own suicide are all examples of the kind of actions Emma was in danger of doing, but did not actually commit.

Like other romantic revolutionary women writers, Hays does not end her novel with the traditional closing of death or marriage. After all the frenzy, Emma Courtney closes with the heroine's aging: "The frost of a premature age sheds its snows upon my temples, the ravages of a sickly mind shake my tottering frame" (II, 218). Emma has survived both her lover and her husband, and is the one responsible for bringing up her own daughter and Augustus' son. Her youthful passions and energies are now channelled into maternal affections, as she desires her son to be "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" (II, 220).

Valuable though this lesson may be, what is more significant in Hays's first novel is that it attempts to revolutionize man's consciousness. In not indulging in the gratification of traditional female romantic dreams--marriage with an ideal man--Hays' novel suggests that matrimony is not the solution to every woman's problems. The man who Emma believed was the incarnation of perfection turns out far from exemplary: he is not only a liar, but a coward, as he fails to tell Emma the truth about his marital status. Female quest in the novel ends not with

romance, but with an unconventional mother and child dyad. Mothering and the concern for the education of youth culminates the story. Emma's ability to perform her maternal and pedagogical duties implies that a woman's reliance on self and reason, rather than on a husband and romance, is one possible answer to some of the issues and questions about woman's role in society raised in the narrative.

Furthermore, through its depiction of one woman's alienation and suffering, her struggle with the customs of the world, Emma Courtney articulates female desire for knowledge, for love and sexual passion, for freedom and autonomy, and the opportunity to express oneself. Its innovative use of the sentimental romance shows the possibilities in using a feminine discourse to communicate woman's experience, her dreams and visions. Most importantly, Hays challenged the restrictive boundaries for women created by the patriarchal society by writing about the kinds of things not allowed to the "fair sex."

Notes to Chapter II

¹ As quoted by Burton Pollin, 279.

² In "Of Ideas in General, and their Original," An Essay Concerning Human Understanding John Locke argues that "all materials of reason and knowledge" are derived from experience. He says: "Our observation, employed either about external sensible objects, or about the internal operations of our minds, perceived and reflected on by ourselves, is that which supplies our understandings with all the materials of thinking. These two are the fountains of knowledge, from whence all the ideas we have, or can naturally have, do spring."

Half a century later in his Observations on Man (1749), David Hartley developed the main outlines of associationist psychology, explaining the specific ways in which ideas are combined or 'associated' with one another. Hartley analyzed the formation of all human character by circumstances, through the universal principle of Association, and the consequent unlimited possibility of improving the moral and intellectual condition of mankind by education. He attempted to dissect "affections and passions...by reversing the steps of the associations which concur to form them." This might then teach us "how to cherish and improve good ones, check and root out such as are mischievous and immoral." (As qtd. by Gina Luria, "Hays: Biography," 303).

³ Some orphan-heroines who end up with not only a husband but a sizeable fortune at the end of the novel are: Fanny Burney's Evelina (1778); Ann Radcliffe's Emily St. Aubert in The Mysteries of Udolpho, A Romance (1794); and Charlotte Smith's Emmeline, or the Orphan of the Castle (1788).

⁴ See, for example, Tony Tanner's chapter on La Nouvelle Héloïse in his Adultery in the Novel.

⁵ In her biography, Luria says that Hays had a "one-sided 'romance' with William Frend." As her heroine Emma did to Augustus, Hays "wrote Frend at length expressing her passion" (10).

Chapter III

HELEN MARIA WILLIAMS

The most zealous and loyal supporter of the French Revolution among the women novelists was Helen Maria Williams (1762?-1827). In The English Novel in the Magazines, 1740-1815 Robert D. Mayo describes her as "something of a rage," and states that she "remained for more than ten years the principal interpreter and popular spokesman for political changes in the neighboring republic" (259). Ironically, her love of liberty, her close association and involvement with the radical factions, especially the Girondists, contributed to her fame and then later became the reason for her unpopularity and infamy in England.

Until the early 1790s Williams was on her way to becoming one of London's most fashionable literary figures. She had published several poems which were well received. In An Ode to Peace (1783), Peru (1784), and The Slave Trade (1788), her love of freedom and peace manifests itself in her support of slaves and conquered Indians in Peru. Her only novel, Julia, and her Letters Written in France in the Summer of 1790 both came out in 1790. The last work is not so much a collection of letters as "an animated medley of anecdote, gossip and hearsay, personal impressions, reports

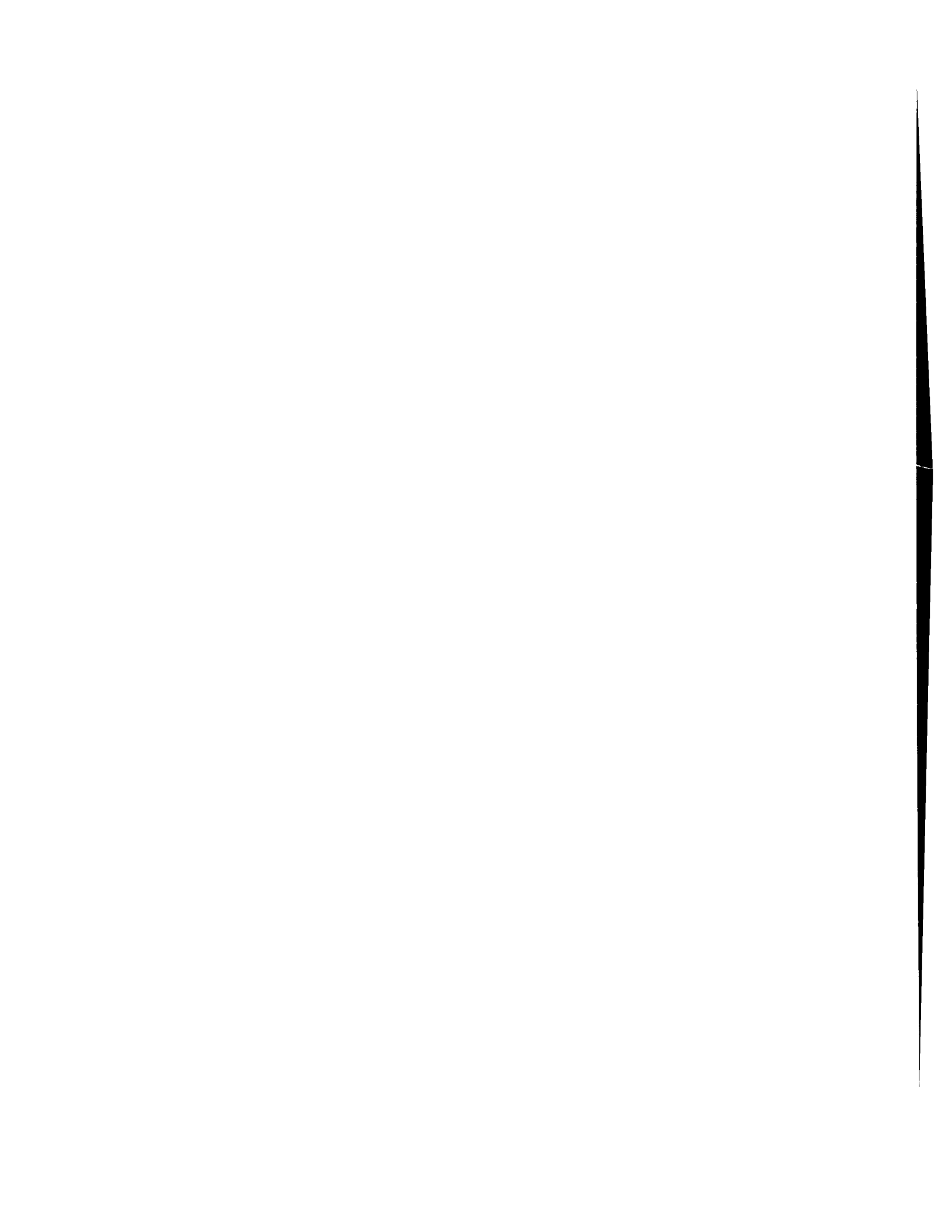
published in the papers, and summaries of political events, the whole presented in the form of an epistolary chronicle. It is also a 'Tour', in the then-fashionable manner of such works" (Mayo, 260).

As to her personal charm we have several testimonies. In 1787 the youthful Wordsworth paid tribute to her in a poem called "On Seeing Miss Helen Maria Williams Weep at a Tale of Distress." Her name appeared on the list of guests invited to Hester Lynch Thrale Piozzi's concert in February 1789. Others at the gathering and in the same circle included General Paoli, Dr. Lot, Mrs. Byron, Mrs. Lewis, Lady Hesketh, the Greatheeds, the Siddons, the Kembles, Mrs. Garrick, Mr. Greville and Hannah More (Clifford, Piozzi, 334). In 1789, Mrs. Piozzi referred to Williams several times in her diary. Musing about women and popular poets, she writes: "I do think Helen Maria Williams has distanced all her competitors in Lines upon the Slave Trade" (Balderston, Thraliana, 730). Again in May she reflects: "How the Women do shine of late! Miss Williams' Ode on Otaheite..." (748). Still pleased with Williams in early January 1791, she records: "We have had some pretty People about us this X'mas....Helen Maria Williams whose pensive Look and loveliness of Manner engages every one's Affection while her Talents render her extremely respectable" (794).

However, in the following years, the London literati became antagonistic towards Williams and attacked her for her support of the French, as well as for her illicit

relationship with the unhappily married John Hurford Stone. Horace Walpole called her a "scribbling trollop," while the Gentleman's Magazine pronounced that "she has debased her sex, her heart, her feelings." ¹ The Reverend Richard Polwhele described her as "an intemperate advocate of Gallic licentiousness." Even Mrs. Piozzi, by 1794, was indignant with her friend. On receiving a letter from Williams, she did not answer, remarking: "I had...discretion enough not to correspond with a profess'd Jacobine resident at Paris" (895). On February 1, 1795, Mrs. Piozzi noted: "Helen Maria Williams has totally lost her char^acter-as a woman, She lives with Mr. Stone tho' he has a wife alive" (910). Two months later, she pronounced her disapproval: "Helen Maria Williams' Friends are all ashamed of her" (922).

Janet M. Todd accounts for the shift of Williams' popularity in her Introduction to Letters from France: "The change in national feeling toward Williams reflects less her inconsistency than the inconsistency of her English detractors, and it was indeed her inability to change her opinions according to time and circumstance that caused the hostility. The times had changed and pity for the oppressed, applauded in 1788, was regarded very differently in 1798" (1). Williams' friends in England disapproved of her continued enthusiasm and belief in the French Revolution through its darker stages, the Reign of Terror. Boswell struck out his description of her as "amiable" from the second edition of his Life of Dr. Johnson. Anna Seward, an



old correspondent of Williams, was appalled at her friend's blind devotion to France, "that land of carnage" (Todd, 5).

In 1803, Williams became the subject of even more abuse because of her edition of The Political and Confidential Correspondence of Lewis the Sixteenth, a forged manuscript which she unsuspectingly bought from a bookseller. Her republican sentiments were inappropriate and unwelcome to English readers "partly no doubt because of the war hysteria against France sweeping the country at the time" (Todd, 8). Out of financial necessity, she continued to write and publish almost until her death in 1827. But she never regained the kind of acceptance she enjoyed in her earlier years.

Julia, A Novel

The Monthly Review praised Williams' only novel for its "simple, affecting instructive story," "the richness and brilliance of the similes," and the "elegant" poetry throughout the work. The Critical Review was similarly enthusiastic, commenting on the "elegant and pleasing" language, the "tender, pathetic, and pleasing" story, and the "characters" and "conduct conceived in no uncommon style" (Luria, "Introduction," Julia, I, 6). As the reviews suggest, Julia reads like another typical sentimental novel. Written before Williams' full involvement with the French Revolution, for the most part, it is free from Gallic and political opinions. It contains only one reference to the situation on the continent: one of Julia's admirers reads her a poem written by "a friend lately arrived from France" (II, 217). "The Bastille, a Vision" describes the horrors of prison.

In the Advertisement Williams states that the novel is about "the danger arising from the uncontrolled indulgence of strong affections" (I, iii). The subject seems to be identical to that of Hays' in Memoirs of Emma Courtney. Yet, despite its similarities to Hays' and other women's novels which deal primarily with the heroine's emotions and feelings, Williams' work is different in a few subtle, but

significant ways. First, unlike others written principally to amuse the fair, Julia contains a strong satiric attack against the titled and the upper class. Like her more famous contemporary Jane Austen, Williams describes the aristocratic world with ironic detachment.² Her Julia is comparable to Austen's works in more ways than one. Both Williams and Austen see the contradictions inherent in human experience--the ambiguity and confusion of appearance and reality in the social order. Both are concerned with their heroine's development of sense and sensibility. Both satirize the manners of late eighteenth century society not so much in bitter anger, but with sympathy and humour. The one significant difference in their novels is the resolution of the conflict. In Austen's comedies, the sensitive and intelligent heroine is usually rewarded at the end with union with a deserving, worthy man. Thus, Elizabeth Bennet marries Darcy; Emma Woodhouse, Mr. Knightley; Fanny Price, Edmund; and Anne Elliot, Captain Wentworth. The couples, though they may not change society, stand for a kind of redemption and regeneration. We are able to finish reading Austen novels with a feeling that all is well. In Williams' case, there is no such tidy answer or straightforward coupling. Williams leaves her heroine unwedded, and the aristocracy still degenerate.

Another way that Julia is different from other sentimental novels is Williams' careful use of digressions and sub-plots. Two stories involving two other women are

worked into the novel: one to show Julia's charitable nature in contrast with the rest of high society; the other to illustrate the folly of war. Mrs. Meynell's life is an example of the degradation some women suffer while Sophia Herbert's tale demonstrates how women can become peacemakers, creating harmony between fighting men. Like the other romantic revolutionary novels, Williams' is not meant merely to entertain, but to express the author's opinions and ideas.

Finally, the novel is different from conventional ones in the resolution of the conflict. The romance between a man and a woman is subordinated to the friendship between two females.³ Williams highlights the positive aspects of women's bonding in her depiction of the relationship between Julia and her cousin, Charlotte. This quality in women was not frequently portrayed in fiction by male writers. Tompkins notes that too often men showed "disbelief...in the capacity of women for friendship; the serious conviction of thinking men, with which some women agreed, that such a relationship could not survive marriage" (145-6).

As well, Julia shows that the ultimate reward of the female quest does not necessarily have to be either death or marriage. Julia's comfortable life after Frederick's demise attests to the fact that women can find satisfaction in themselves and do not have to always be someone's wife. This rejection of the romance plot is innovative as it offers an alternative vision, a different set of choices for women.

Satiric Portraits: The Hypocritical Rich

Each in her own way, the romantic revolutionary novelists criticized the customs and traditions of late eighteenth century society. Wollstonecraft, in Mary and in Wrongs of Woman, showed that there were serious flaws in the institution of marriage and in the legal system. Hays illustrated how women become excessively emotional and passionate creatures because of the lack of meaningful intellectual pursuits. In Williams the focus is on the evils of fashionable city life: excessive wealth, frivolity, shallowness of both feeling and commitment. Within such a milieu, even the innocent and virtuous can be corrupted.

Williams' concern with social imperfections is shown by the amount of time she devotes to depicting Julia's friends and acquaintances in London. A good hundred pages pass before the plot begins. This first part of the novel illustrates the contrast between Julia's humble background, and the chaos and materiality of city life. Mrs. Melbourne, along with her daughter Mrs. Seymour and her husband, Mr. Seymour, become symbols of the superficiality and artificiality of urban existence. Their selfish and opportunistic behaviour and their empty lives are meant to be negative examples for the young heroine.

Mrs. Melbourne is a prime specimen of fashionable society. Her meanness and heartlessness *are* indicative of

the general condition of this group of people. Though she is wealthy, she is parsimonious: "She gave some alms to the poor, because she thought a little charity was requisite to secure a good place in heaven; but she found no duty more difficult" (I, 8). With her friends she is deceitful. She "could perceive all their follies,...no foible escaped her accurate observation....Whenever her visitors departed, they were sure of being analyzed, and of having their defects weighed in a rigorous scale" (I, 8-9). While she does not lie, Mrs. Melbourne interpreted everything "the worst way possible...refusing to assign a good motive for any thing, when a bad one could be found" (I, 9). Her servants she scolded "with little intermission, which she considered an indispensable part of the province of a good housewife" (I, 10). In short, she, like Iago, could acknowledge "that it was her nature's plague to spy into abuses" (I, 10).

Her daughter, Mrs. Seymour, is perhaps not so vicious, but equally artificial: "Vanity made her selfish; for she was so extravagantly fond of admiration, that, in the continual pursuit of it, she could think only of herself" (I, 28-9). She affects sentiments, in order to be more amiable and more interesting: "She spoke...in a plaintive voice, and often complained of melancholy, but left the cause of it concealed...Sometimes, indeed, she smiled,...but the pensive cast of countenance quickly returned, and an affected sigh explained the difficulty she felt in assuming gaiety" (I, 29-30).

In Mrs. Seymour Williams creates a character whose outward actions are completely incongruous with her inner feeling. Every action becomes merely a show: "If she carved at table, or made tea, she did both with a sort of slow and solemn movement, to convince the company that she was in a frame of mind, from which it cost her a cruel effort to descend to the common offices of life" (I, 30). Like her mother, she finds excuses not to be charitable: "She could not hear an Italian air without weeping; she pitied the miseries of the poor in very pathetic language; and lamented being obliged, in conformity to her situation in life, to spend much more than she wished upon dress, which put it out of her power, in the account of her annual expences, to reckon the claims of benevolence" (I, 30).

Ironically, her "limited" income is the primary reason why Mr. Seymour, an ambitious plotter, married her: "He had married Miss Melbourne, whose person he did not admire, and whose character he disliked, because she had twenty thousand pounds" (I, 53). Williams condemns this relationship and marriage based on money and self-interest, rather than true affection. Mr. and Mrs. Seymour's lives, though full of social activity, are shown to be empty and shallow. Mr. Seymour, whom Williams compares to "a swan gracefully expanding his plumes of purest whiteness to the winds, and carefully hiding his black feet beneath another element" (I, 54), "made love to every woman who had the attraction of youth or beauty" (I, 55). He becomes a social villain in

Williams' view--the epitome of insensitivity and hypocrisy: "Mr. Seymour possessed strong feelings, and his heart was capable of tenderness; but ambition, and long commerce with the world, had almost entirely blunted his sensibility.... Every acquaintance he made was with some interested view" (I, 54).

These accounts not only function as satirical portraits of London life, but also form a context for Julia's story. Williams isolates her heroine from London society. Julia is brought up in retirement under the tutelage of her father who possessed a "highly cultivated" mind (I, 2). Unlike the coquettes of the metropolis who divert themselves with "shopping and dress, and...card-assemblies" (I, 56), Julia "discovered at a very early age a particular sensibility to poetry" and appreciated the "beauties of nature" (I, 13, 78). She represents, in short, innocence and natural goodness. Her emotional ties, to her father, her grandfather, and to her cousin, Charlotte, are strong ones. They originate not from selfish motives, but from true affection and love. With her grandfather, for example, Julia "was ever ready to sacrifice every wish, and every pleasure, to his ease and comfort" (I, 62). Set against this background, then, is Julia's dilemma. The problem she must deal with is not a simple one. She has to choose happiness for herself or for another. Her selection aligns her either with the egotistic, selfish socialites or the sincere, generous folk.

Julia's Choice: Affective Relation or Rupture

What is interesting about the kinds of issues that come up in these women's novels is that the problems are woman-centered. That is not to say that the dilemmas that Mary, Emma Courtney, or Julia Clifford face do not involve men, but that they are intrinsically difficulties that affect women rather than men. These difficulties are different, and in some, perhaps subtle, ways more complex than ones faced by heroines of the earlier part of the century--those encountered by Pamela or Clarissa, for example. Richardson's first two novels, though named after the female protagonist, still very much define the heroine in terms of patriarchal, male values. The women are viewed primarily as daughters, mistresses, wives or potential mothers by the male characters. Their function and existence depend on how well or how poorly they fulfill these roles.

By contrast, in most of the novels discussed in this study, women's sense of self is not solely defined in terms of their gender or sexuality. While it is true that they are limited in various ways by their sex, they are nevertheless shown to have capacities, interests, and responsibilities apart from those which originate from their being female or from their relations with men. The heroines are autonomous human beings who search for the right mode of conduct, for meaning in life; they are not merely man's

other half or his helpmate.

Hence, in Julia, Williams creates a character who is essentially a complete and independent being, a self who is defined not primarily in terms of her beauty, femininity, and delicacy, but in terms of her moral virtues, her emotional and intellectual capabilities. Julia is described as possessing "the powers of the understanding, and the virtues of the heart: her sensibility was quick, her disposition affectionate, and her taste...attained an uncommon degree of elegance and refinement" (I, 3). She has imagination and understanding. At a very "early age" she discovered "a particular sensibility to poetry" (I, 13). As well, she feels strong emotional attachments both to her father, who cared about her enough to "under[take] himself the charge of her education" (I, 2), and to her cousin, Charlotte who "tenderly loved" her (I, 5). This last tie becomes important in the novel as from it stems Julia's dilemma.

In Williams' novel affection and friendship for another of the same sex is depicted as an important and a positive aspect of the heroine's life. The bond between Julia and Charlotte dates back to their childhood years. They enjoy each other's company and spend much time together. In fact, in leaving London, Julia "lamented nothing so much...as her separation from Charlotte" (I, 57). The strength of this friendship is tested with the introduction of Charlotte's suitor, Frederick Seymour, who later discovers an

"unconquerable passion" for Julia (I, 116).

Significantly, in working out a resolution to the love triangle, Williams does not follow the more masculine tendencies of rivalry and competition. Though the heroine is a more suitable partner for the male protagonist, she does not simply supplant the other girl's place for the convenience of the plot. Instead Julia's love and sense of obligation to her cousin inspires her to stifle her own feelings for the man, and sacrifice her own happiness for the domestic felicity of her cousin. The interest of more than half of the novel arises from the heroine's ability or inability to adhere to her decision.

This resolution to the conflict supports the theories of recent feminist psychoanalysts such as Nancy Chodorow who, in The Reproduction of Mothering, argues that because of their psychic maturation,⁴ women "grow up and remain more connected to others" (177). The roles which girls learn are "more interpersonal, particularistic, and affective than those which boys learn" (177). Feminine personality comes to be based more on "retention and continuity of external relationships," while masculine personality comes "to be defined more in terms of denial of relation and connection" (169). Because of their tendency to retain more ties, "women have other resources and a certain distance from their relationships to men" (198). Chodorow suggests that women "have a richer, ongoing inner world to fall back on, and that the men in their lives do

not represent the intensity and exclusivity that women represent to men" (198).

If Chodorow is correct, it may well be that women tend to deal with relationships in terms of accommodation rather than confrontation; in other words, it may be more in keeping with their psychological development to identify and accept a number of roles rather than usurp someone else's. Williams' heroine opts for continuity and connection rather than for severance and usurpation. In the novel Julia chooses the more feminine alternative. Though she reciprocated Seymour's passion, she determined to "lock the fatal secret within her own breast," and "hasten [her cousin's] marriage by every means in her power (I, 119).

By subordinating romantic love between a man and a woman to the friendship and respect of two girls, Williams undermines the assumption that woman's emotional commitment must necessarily be to that of a man. Williams offers a portrait of women which is an alternative to those of the patriarchs of the mid-century: women are no longer innocent angels or vile seducers, catty rivals for the hand of one man. Rather, they are sensitive beings, capable of other kinds of affective relations and devotion to other women.

Other Tales of Strong Affections--Sophia Herbert

The love story of Captain F. and Sophia Herbert, inserted in epistolary form at the end of Volume I, illustrates the "dreadful...effects of war" and how war made "happiness impossible" (I, 263). Like Charlotte Smith in The Old Manor House, Williams points out that war is falsely glorified, and that no conquest is gained without pain and sorrow. She asserts that "Every form of evil and misery is in its train: the groans of despair are mingled with the song of triumph, and the laurels of victory are nourished with the tears of humanity" (I, 263).

This short tale, with its far away setting of Virginia during the American War of Independence, may seem to be a digression from the main plot, but, in fact, it expresses many of the same concerns as Julia's story. Sophia, like Julia, must choose between familial relations and romantic love. Her choice is complicated by the fact that her brothers and her suitor are fighting on different sides of the struggle. Through this tale Williams makes the tragic consequences of war more immediate and personal. For the young woman, Sophia, war is not the killing of an abstract entity called the "enemy," but the murder of someone she loves by a relation of hers. In her delirium after the death of the British captain, she even imagines that her younger brother was the one who "murdered" her lover (I, 259).

The love story illustrates the possibilities of woman as mediator and peacemaker in a war. It also serves as a contrast to the main plot. Unlike the heroine, Sophia gives in to her passion and excess; she does not continually check her affections as Julia does in a slightly different situation. For Williams indulgence of passion uncontrolled by reason is detrimental to men and women. Sophia hears that her beloved Captain F. has been killed and becomes greatly affected: "there was a wildness and disorder in her countenance" and the following night "her reason entirely forsook her" (II, 258-9). She even dies from the shock of the news of her lover's death: "she sunk into almost total insensibility...her pulse grew weaker every moment" (I, 261).

The two intradiegetic readers of the tale, Mr. F. and Julia, do not comment upon the story. Williams leaves it up to the readers of her novel to make the connections between the main plot and the short narrative. One could argue that the tale is superfluous, that it exists only to satisfy the novel's largely female audience who liked to indulge in tender scenes of distress.⁵ On the other hand, the inclusion of Sophia Herbert's little history can be justified in a number of ways. As I have pointed out, it echoes Julia's dilemma: whether to follow the dictates of reason or passion. It questions the validity of war by depicting the enemies--the Americans--as sensitive beings, as people with the same kind of emotions and problems as the

English. It shows woman as the one who crosses male-created national boundaries; as a possible mediator between male strife. Most importantly, it shows that Williams was capable of writing the kind of affecting conclusion typical of the novels of sensibility. That she did not end her work with both Frederick and Julia dying and looking forward to the next life is significant. Williams, like Wollstonecraft and Hays, chose instead to present different alternatives for women who do not find fulfillment and satisfaction in romantic love.

Novels such as Emma Courtney and Julia, which finish not with the heroine's marriage or her demise, but with her achievement of a certain level of stability and contentment without a male partner are innovative both thematically and structurally. For their women readers they open up a new set of possibilities. They show that the rewards of virtue and right conduct can be found in other places than in wedded bliss. Both Emma and Julia find comfort in maternal, charitable, and pedagogical duties, for example. These novels, which resist the more masculine teleological tendency for closure and conclusion, reflect the kind of permeability and open-endedness that is more characteristic of woman's experience.⁶ They prove to women that there is life after, and perhaps even outside, the traditional nuclear family and that women do not necessarily have to define themselves by their relations to the patriarchal figure of the household.

Poverty and the Gentlewoman: The Case of Mrs. Meynell

Unlike Sophia Herbert's, Mrs. Meynell's tale is not a short narrative within the novel proper; rather, her story is woven into the main plot. Julia happens to hear of this unfortunate lady's circumstances through the housekeeper, Mrs. Evans. Because of her "eagerness of ardent benevolence," Julia makes Mrs. Meynell's acquaintance, and endeavours, "by every effort in her power, to alleviate her misfortunes" (II, 79).

The most obvious reason for the inclusion of this extraneous character is that it gives Williams a chance to show Julia's charity in action. Julia, whose sensibility is such that she even rescues and writes poetry for injured birds, possessed a heart which "melted with compassion for the oppressed." She therefore hoped to "act as the agent of Providence, in protecting afflicted virtue" (II, 78). But the introduction of Mrs. Meynell serves a more important task than that of allowing Julia to display her generosity. Mrs. Meynell's predicament is an illustration of the plight of the poor gentlewoman.

Like Mary and Maria in Wollstonecraft's novels, Mrs. Meynell is an intelligent, sensitive woman who is unhappily married to an uncouth, sullen brute. Mrs. Meynell was "tall, graceful, and elegant...there was a dignity in her manner which commanded respect," while Captain Meynell's manners were "disgusting, and his person usually dirty. His mind was a strange compound of pride and meanness" (II, 88,

89). His "sordid meanness, vulgarity, and ill-humour" continually frustrated her chances for marital happiness (II, 91). She was either "wearied with his mirth, disgusted by his fondness, shocked by his meanness, or wounded by his brutality" (II, 91).

While Williams, unlike Wollstonecraft, did not intend primarily to write about the oppression of woman, the incorporation of Mrs. Meynell's tale shows her awareness of this social problem. For, in addition to her destitution, Mrs. Meynell is ill-treated by all kinds of people. Her husband misuses her, fashionable ladies such as Mrs. Seymour and Miss C. ridicule and scorn her, while Mr. Seymour, unknown to his wife, wants to "keep her...for his own vile ends" (II, 76). Through her, Williams demonstrates the powerlessness of females in this position. Women who are supposed to be genteel cannot work, and have no means of ameliorating their domestic and social condition.

The contrast between the generous Julia and the self-centered aristocratic ladies is brought out in their attitude towards Mrs. Meynell. Williams describes the ladies of fashion with ironic humour. Mrs. Seymour believed they should deny Mrs. Meynell's visit as she was in low spirits on account of her sick little dog, Bijoux. She thought that Mrs. Meynell's clothes are "grown too shabby" to be in company (II, 102). Mrs. Melbourne "cannot understand what right people have to the indulgence of so much sensibility, who are in poverty" (II, 102). She says:

"People in affluence may indulge the delicacy of their feelings; and mine, I own, are so affected by the company of unfortunate persons, that I am obliged, in regard to my health; to avoid them carefully" (II, 102). Julia, on the other hand, does not judge people by their possessions or outside appearances. She enjoyed Mrs. Meynell's conversation and company. Her "attentive kindness...soothed and gratified" Mrs. Meynell (II, 107).

Through Julia's efforts, Captain Meynell is given an office in India while Mrs. Meynell is received into Mr. Clifford's family, where she is "treated with every mark of respect and kindness" (II, 242). Williams' depiction of Julia's friendship and consideration for another of the same sex shows a positive affirmation of woman's affective capabilities. Her humanitarianism is an illustration of the kinds of acts that could result from being truly understanding and sympathetic to poverty and affliction, as opposed to the superficial statements of sensibility, as expressed by Mrs. Melbourne, for example.

The two digressive tales about the women function differently in the novel. While both are pathetic, moving stories of people with problems, one exhibits "the danger arising from the uncontrolled indulgence of strong affections," while the other presents virtue and charity, controlled by reason, in action (I, iii). Julia's own plight and its conclusion; then, must be read in the context of these two other narratives.

Conclusion: Changing the Story

In The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800 J.M.S.

Tompkins notes that though "there is no sudden demand for realism in the 'eighties, ...What there is, is a gradually increasing proportion of common-sense" in novels. For Tompkins, one proof of this assertion comes from the fact that there is "a little more integrity in winding up the end of a plot" (175). She cites the end of Julia as an example "where the catastrophe is neither evaded nor exaggerated" (175, n.2).

Actually, Julia ends rather curiously. For a love triangle with two women and one man, the easiest and most obvious solution would have been the elimination of one of the women, either the wife, Charlotte, or the heroine, Julia. The man and the woman who survived could then have lived "happily-ever-after." The circumstances which close the novel suggest that Williams either contemplated concluding with the heterosexual couple, or was aware that her readers would have been waiting for such a finish, and deliberately chose not to write that way.

In the last twenty pages of the novel the lives of all three of the major characters are put in danger. Julia has an accident in her sedan chair, sustains a cut on her forehead which "bled violently" (II, 207), grows "pale and thin," and loses her appetite (II, 213). Charlotte, on the other hand, "was seized with some degree of fever" after the

delivery of her son (II, 224). Frederick catches an infectious disease and also comes down with a high fever. From these various threats most readers would expect a death to occur. The irony is that when death does strike, it takes away the only leading man, rather than either one of the two women in the novel.

This deliberate twist to the end of a love triangle has interesting implications for the feminist reader. If the novel is indeed about the "danger arising from the uncontrolled indulgence of strong affections," as Williams asserts in her Advertisement (I, iii), then the character who succumbs to this weakness is Frederick, and not, as one would expect from the title of the book, Julia. Significantly, it is Frederick who is most often overcome with emotions; it is he who believes that the power of passion is "absolute, that it is unconquerable" (II, 203). Finally, it is he who suffers death.

In her depiction of Frederick's attachment to Julia and its tragic consequences, Williams may be consciously reversing or rejecting the belief that reason is a male prerogative and feeling a female one. After Frederick's demise the didactic narrator says:

Such was the fate of this unfortunate young man, who fell the victim of that fatal passion, which he at first unhappily indulged, and which he was at length unable to subdue....

Let those who possess the talents, or the vir-

tues, by which he was distinguished, avoid similar wretchedness, by guarding their minds against the influence of passion; since, if it be once suffered to acquire an undue ascendancy over reason, we shall in vain attempt to controul its power...

(II, 237-8)

She associates Julia, and by implication, other women, with fortitude and good sense. Julia is the one who always has to remind Frederick of his duty to his wife. Of the two, she seems to be more able to control her emotions and passion. The narrator observes:

Women have even greater reason than men to fortify their hearts against those strong affections, which, when not regulated by discretion, plunge in aggravated misery that sex, who to use the words of an elegant and amiable writer, 'cannot plunge into business, or dissipate themselves in pleasure and riot, as men often do, when under the pressure of misfortune; but must bear their sorrows in silence, unknown and unpitied; must often put on a face of serenity and chearfulness, when their hearts are torn with anguish, or sinking in despair.' (II, 239-240)

The conclusion, then, rewards the heroine for her ability to follow the dictates of reason and discretion rather than passion. Julia's reward is not, as conventional romance would have it, marriage with the hero, but a tranquil and

harmonious life. She finds "consolation in the duties of religion; the exercise of benevolence, and the society of persons of understanding and merit. To such people her acquaintance was highly valuable, and she lived admired, respected, and beloved" (II, 244-5). Williams stresses that a single life for Julia is by choice, as Julia "refused many honourable offers of marriage" (II, 245). Rather than ending with the traditional husband and wife, Williams has Julia fulfilling her maternal and pedagogical duties. She devotes much time to the "improvement" of Seymour and Charlotte's child (II, 245).

Changing the traditional story has important implications. Rachel Blau Duplessis says:

To change the story signals a dissent from social norms as well as narrative forms. This is because people are relatively more comfortable with stories whose elements are "renewed, recreated, defended and modified"; they are naturally drawn to those events, emotions and endings which are recognizable, apparently corresponding to 'experience.' The poetics of critique of the women authors here, that questioning of the construction of gender in narrative form, is cast in very literary terms ('disobeying the novel') precisely because it must distance the reader from codes of expected narrative and from patterns of response that seemed to command universal or na-

tural status. (Writing Beyond the Ending, 20)

The changes Williams wrought to the "story" demonstrate that there were rewards and tasks for women other than being man's wife and helpmate. In this way Williams' work rejects traditional novels which place romance and marriage at the centre of the narrative. In essence Julia shows that love for a man was not the only possible interpreter to women's lives.

Notes to Chapter III

¹ As quoted by Janet M. Todd, "Introduction," Letters from France, by Helen Maria Williams, 1.

² Many critics, including Frank W. Bradbrook, Mary Lascelles, and Andrew H. Wright, have used "irony" and "ironic" in describing Austen's style. Though there is no direct evidence, Austen may have read Williams. She was certainly influenced by other romantic revolutionary novelists such as Charlotte Smith and Elizabeth Inchbald. See John Halperin, The Life of Jane Austen, 26.

³ Although in Women's Friendship in Literature Janet Todd asserts that "eighteenth-century fiction is rich in presentations of female friendship, by both men and women" (1), the majority of the characters she cites, such as Clarissa, Rousseau's Julie, Austen's Fanny Price and Emma, are shown in their relation to men, and their "friendships" are subordinated to the interests of the heterosexual romance in the novels.

⁴ According to Nancy Chodorow, the psychic maturation of a young girl neither repeats nor simply reverses the oedipal configuration that Freud identified in young boys. Like the boy, the girl originally identifies with the mother; but, for her, this preoedipal identification is more formative and long-lasting than the boy's identification. When the girl's father does become important, it is "in the context of a bisexual relational

triangle....A girl usually turns to her father as an object of primary interest from the exclusivity of the relationship to her mother, but this libidinal turning to her father does not substitute for her attachment to her mother. Instead, a girl retains her preoedipal tie to her mother...and builds oedipal attachments to both her mother and father upon it" (Reproduction, 192-93).

⁵ J.M.S. Tompkins discusses "tears" and "distress" in The Popular Novel in England 1770-1800, 96-105. She writes: "It became the fashion to conclude a novel with a funeral. 'The heroes and heroines must all be buried,' said the Monthly in 1787," 103.

⁶ Chodorow believes that women tend to have more permeable ego boundaries and tend to define themselves more relationally than men do. In The Reproduction of Mothering she states: "Women and men grow up with personalities affected by different boundary experiences and differently constructed and experienced inner object-worlds, and are preoccupied with different relational issues. Feminine personality comes to be based less on repression of inner objects, and fixed and firm splits in the ego, and more on retention and continuity of external relationshipsgrowing girls come to define and experience themselves as continuous with others; their experience of self contains more flexible or permeable ego boundaries. Boys come to define themselves as more separate and distinct, with a greater sense of rigid ego boundaries and differentiation" (169).

Chapter IV
Elizabeth Inchbald

Born the daughter of a poor Roman Catholic farmer at Standingfield in Suffolk, Elizabeth Inchbald, née Simpson (1753-1821), made remarkable achievements for a woman of the late eighteenth century. With no formal education, she familiarized herself with literature from Homer to Shakespeare, read countless Restoration pieces, learned enough French to translate plays and, by the end of her life, became a celebrated actress, dramatist, novelist and editor. Struggling with poverty throughout her life, she supported herself and her many siblings by writing and reworking nearly twenty plays, publishing two novels and editing three different collections of dramatic works. At her death she managed to accumulate an estate of more than five thousand pounds.

Despite a very pronounced stammer, at seventeen the young Elizabeth decided she wanted to be an actress. Two years later she ran away from her mother's home, and went to London to get a place in a theatrical company. There she married Joseph Inchbald, an actor and painter seventeen years her senior. Together they performed such parts as Cordelia and Lear, Calphurnia and Caesar, Lady Anne and Richard III, Desdemona and Othello, and travelled with their

acting company to Edinburgh, to Paris, as well as to nearby cities, such as Liverpool and Canterbury.

Marriage afforded Elizabeth protection, but it was not a blissful state. The Inchbalds were more than once at the end of their resources and went without an evening meal. In "An Account of my Septembers," a fragment of her diary published by James Boaden in 1833, Inchbald kept track of Septembers since her wedding and recorded only the first year as a "happy" one. The other six were noted as "midling" and "unhappy" or "not happy" (Littlewood, 127). Joseph Inchbald often paid attention to other attractive actresses and did not spend enough time with her. Young and reputedly beautiful, she found herself, in turn, courted by various other men.

Among these admirers, Elizabeth fell in love with the brother of Sarah Siddons, John Philip Kemble, who in 1777 was a handsome dark-eyed youth of twenty and who had been trained for the Roman Catholic priesthood. They became good friends, and at his suggestion, Inchbald began her novel, A Simple Story, with Kemble as the model for the hero. Because of their independent characters, this relationship never culminated in matrimony, even after the death of Joseph Inchbald in June of 1779.

Not completely satisfied with her acting career, Inchbald nevertheless stayed at Covent Garden, played in small parts and worked on costumes for the stage. She attempted some farces, but it was not until 1784 that her

piece The Mogul Tale was successfully staged and subsequently published. From this point on she produced a series of plays, most of them comedies, which were well-received and which brought her a moderately good income. They included: I'll Tell You What (1786), Appearance is Against Them (1785), The Widow's Vow (1786), Such Things Are (1788), Animal Magnetism (1789), Next Door Neighbors (1791) and Everyone has his Faults (1793).

As a widow Inchbald was wooed with proposals and propositions from many men. Among the most notable she refused were the revolutionary Thomas Holcroft, Richard "Dicky Gossip" Suett, Colonel Glover, Richard Wilson, Sir Charles Bunbury, and William Godwin. After the publication of A Simple Story (1791), she did not confine her society to people in the theatre, but associated with other fashionable folk such as Lady Cork, *Amelia* Alderson (Opie) and Mrs. Barbauld.

Her most happy years were those she spent writing her own pieces. After Wives as They Are and Maids as They Should Be (1797), Lovers' Vows (1798), and To Marry or not to Marry (1805), and shortly after the turn of the century, Inchbald stopped working on her own creations and took on the task of editor and critic. She wrote the biographical and critical prefaces to the British Theatre 25 vols., and compiled Modern Theatre 10 vols., and Collection of Farces 7 vols. She died on August 1, 1821.

i. A Simple Story

In a letter to Elizabeth Inchbald dated 14 January 1810, Maria Edgeworth writes:

I hope you will not suspect me of the common author practice of returning praise for praise, when I tell you that I have just been reading, for the third--I believe for the fourth time--the 'Simple Story.' Its effect upon my feelings was as powerful as the first reading; I never read any novel--I except none--I never read any novel that affected me so strongly, or that so completely possessed me with the belief in the real existence of all the people it represents. I never once recollected the author whilst I was reading it; never said or thought, that's a fine sentiment--or, that is well expressed--or that is well invented. I believed all to be real, and was affected as I should be by the real scenes if they had passed before my eyes: it is truly and deeply pathetic.¹

Though the modern reader may not agree with Edgeworth's idea of what is "real," one has to acknowledge the justice in her observation of the powerful and affecting nature of the work. J.M.S Tompkins, in her introduction to the novel, attests that "A Simple Story...is one of the few minor

novels of the late eighteenth century to have an unbroken life. It was reprinted at intervals through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth" (vii). Tompkins and Kelly point out that much of the strength of A Simple Story is in Inchbald's ability to transfer the actor's art into novel form (Tompkins, viii, Kelly, 79, 86). Inchbald's gift of showing what Kelly calls "the repression and the force of powerful but natural feelings" by "intelligible but simple signs" probably accounts for Edgeworth's "belief in the real existence of all the people it represents" (Kelly, 79, 78).

My interest lies not so much in this aspect of Inchbald, but in the ways in which she is a romantic revolutionary. Inchbald, unlike Wollstonecraft and Hays, did not express her discontentment with the condition of woman in direct or overt statements. But, like them, she was conscious of the inadequacies of the roles designated to female sex and, using more subtle, sometimes, ironic means, showed her readers these problems. Her feminine reactions to the social order, her insistence on the importance of feeling and sensibility, align her more with the romantic revolutionary women novelists, rather than with the English Jacobins, such as Godwin and Holcroft, with their emphasis, according to Kelly, on rationalism and "faith in reason" (English Jacobin Novel, 2).

The Importance of the Heart

In A Simple Story Inchbald shows again and again her belief in inner feeling and sensibility as opposed to mere talk or external gestures. She is aware that custom often propels a person to act or speak differently from the way his or her heart dictates. No longer is the world characterized in "classical" terms of openness and clarity, but is viewed as mysterious and dark, with the location of truth shifted to interior space. In the ever-changing, more "modern"² society of the late eighteenth century, appearances are never enough; they are never the full truth.

As early as 1690 John Locke in his Essay Concerning Human Understanding had questioned the problematic use of words, of "articulate sounds," to stand for "the ideas in the mind of him that uses them" (III, ii, 1-2). He saw the difficulty of using language to express the reality of things, what he called "substances" (III, ii, 5). Locke pointed out that words acquire signification by "a perfect arbitrary imposition" and that "they often fail to excite in others...the same ideas we take them to be signs of" (III, ii, 8).³

That Inchbald was conscious of these complexities and the potential duplicity of social communication and external signs is evident in both her novels, as well as in several of her plays. In fact, the discrepancy between what is intended by a certain action or a certain discourse and what is understood to be their meaning frequently creates the

tension in Inchbald's works. For example, the plots of her early comedies Appearance is Against Them (1785) and Such Things Are (1787) both hinge on the axiom that things are not what they seem to be. In Appearance is Against Them (the title is suggestive of the theme), the serious and self-righteous Mr. Walmsley, who is caught quite by accident in a bed-chamber with a lady, pronounces at the close of the play, that the "adventures" have warned him "never to judge with severity, while the parties have only appearances against them" (II, i). Similarly, in Such Things Are, the pagan sultan who appears to be cruel and tyrannical in public is in reality an unhappy, but kind Christian in disguise.

In A Simple Story the theme of the deceptive nature of appearance and of everyday social conversation occurs often and in different ways. It is used to show the potential harm which can result from following the dictates of Art rather than those of Nature, a subject which is further explored in Inchbald's second novel. In Dorriforth's case the insistence on right conduct and on adhering to one's resolution no matter how foolish it may be almost causes him to lose, first his wife, and then his daughter. For Dorriforth, not being trained to acknowledge his own feelings, was willing to sacrifice his own happiness to propriety, to external appearance, or to unquestioned and inflexible principles.. Had Miss Milner not declared her passion for him, he would have married the insipid but

wealthy Miss Fenton, following the sensible advice of his Jesuit tutor, Mr. Sandford.

Similarly, all the while thinking of his daughter with tenderness and affection, he banishes her from him because she reminds him of his unfaithful wife. He even prohibits his household from mentioning her name. Inchbald lets her readers know that Dorriforth or Lord Elmwood, as he later becomes, is caught in his own prisonhouse of unnatural codes of behaviour. His restrictions upon speech and conduct produce a home dominated by fear, deceit, and desperation. Until he recognizes Matilda as his daughter, Lord Elmwood's words and gestures do not reflect his heart. A gap opens up between appearances, in both action and language, and their true meaning. For the characters as well as for the reader, truth becomes something which must be searched out.

In another, more trivial, instance, Inchbald states the problem of language and meaning directly in her narrative. Contrasting the characters of Mrs. Horton and Miss Woodley, Inchbald again shows that words can belie one's purport. In one of her playful moods, Miss Milner laughs at Mrs. Horton who inappropriately makes the "sign of the cross upon her forehead" (17). While Mrs. Horton says "God forgive you" to Miss Milner, and Miss Woodley says that she "will not" forgive her, Inchbald writes: "But how unimportant, how weak, how ineffectual are words in conversation--looks and manners alone express--for Miss Woodley, with her charitable face and mild accents, saying she would not forgive, implied

only forgiveness--while Mrs. Horton, with her enraged voice and aspect, begging heaven to pardon the offender, palpably said, she thought her unworthy of all pardon" (17). While Inchbald here tells us to trust "looks and manners," she, in fact, is thinking of one's unspoken intentions or response. In another spot Inchbald illustrates the inadequacy of words when social custom dictates certain euphemisms. Miss Milner, for example, says that she forms "new friendships," rather than acknowledge that she is flirting with her male admirers. Inchbald realizes that this practice contributes to confusion in communication, what she calls the "unmeaning language of the world" (18).

What these examples suggest is that since meaning is not readily located in external signs or in speech, then it must be situated elsewhere. The locus of truth is the heart. Ironically, the stern Dorriforth is the first to point out to Miss Milner that the heart is "so precious--the dangers, the sorrows you hazard in bestowing it, are greater than you may be aware of. The heart once gone, our thoughts, our actions, are no more our own, than that is" (25). Like Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Williams, Inchbald acknowledges the importance of feeling and sensibility, the value of the heart. Cold logic, reason and rationalism, usually associated with males, are not discredited, but they should not be the basis of all one's decisions and actions.

For this reason we are meant to see Miss Milner not as

a wholly reprehensible character. Despite her shortcomings, her vanity, her willfulness and impetuosity, Miss Milner sincerely loves Dorriforth. All her actions stem from her insecurity. She is afraid that her passion is not fully reciprocated. Miss Milner is governed by her heart, and early on she declares her admiration for and adoration of her clerical guardian: "I love him with all the passion of a mistress, and with all the tenderness of a wife" (72). This confession is made when there is no possible or logical means of fulfilling her love. That she herself sees her strength and her follies is evident when she says: "I am weak, I am volatile, I am indiscreet, but I have a heart from whence some impressions can never be erased" (69).

Even the unfeeling, pragmatic Sandford, after seeing how miserable both Dorriforth and Miss Milner become when they try to suppress their emotions, admits that he has "been in an error" (191) and even advises Miss Milner saying: "You should judge him by your own heart, and what you feel for him, imagine he feels for you" (185). Inchbald, in letting Dorriforth be overcome by feeling rather than living only by reason in both parts of the novel, is implicitly bringing up the same question that is dealt with by Wollstonecraft, and later by Austen. All these women novelists recognize that though acting according to one's heart or sensibility was dangerous; to act solely according to intellect or sense was equally perilous: one could become treacherous to oneself.

The Woman's Question

The feminist critic searching for a positive female figure or role-model, that is, a self-actualized heroine whose identity does not depend on men, is sadly disappointed to find that such a character does not seem to exist in Inchbald's novels nor in any of her plays.⁴ Because of Inchbald's extraordinarily independent life after the death of her husband--she earned her own living and refused many offers of marriage,--one expects that she might have translated her experience into her imaginative writings. But nowhere in her works do we find the kind of strong, sensible, intelligent, emancipated heroine, such as we see in Hays' Emma Courtney.

The reason for this absence may be partly explained in Inchbald's essay on novel writing published in The Artist on 13 June 1807.⁵ In this somewhat facetious article, Inchbald claims that though she does not know how to "produce a good novel," she can show "how to avoid writing a very bad one" (9). She points out that there are some readers who "are all hostile to originality. They are so devoted to novel-reading, that they admire one novel because it puts them in mind of another" (12). If this referentiality is true of novels in general, it may also be true of specific characters. Perhaps Inchbald believed that readers liked to be reminded of characters from another work

when they read. The heroines of A Simple Story are variations of the women characters found in a number of literary works of the time.⁶ Certainly she thinks that audience response is a consideration for the dramatic writer, who is the "very slave of the audience," and who "must have their tastes and prejudices in view" (16). Though she does say that the novelist is more a "free agent" than the dramatic writer, she must have been aware that certain types of novels were more welcomed by readers than others. Her own novel, A Simple Story, was not accepted in its original shorter form in 1779, but became a success in its revised two-part form. I will offer some speculations on the structure and its implications later.

In the same essay, Inchbald also encourages novelists to use their work to give "intimation of two or three foibles" in human nature to their readers with "good sense" (14). Novels can make readers aware of "failings" which are "beneath the animadversions of the pulpit" (14). These faults are "so trivial yet so awkward, that neither sermons, history, travels, nor biography, could point them out with propriety" (14). One of the aims of her novels may have been to show these "trivial" weaknesses in people.

What Inchbald does succeed in doing with her heroine, Miss Milner, is producing a female character who does not fit easily into either of two stereotypical conceptions of woman: she is neither the pure angel nor the depraved whore. Rather, Miss Milner is an interesting composition of

desirable and undesirable human qualities. She is endowed with intelligence, sensitivity and generosity, but she is also prone to certain failings-- vanity, jealousy, and obstinacy. Tompkins compares her character with "Miss Burney's Cecilia, Henry Mackenzie's Julia de Roubigné, or Mrs. Griffith's Lady Barton" and observes that Miss Milner "does not move in Clarissa's sphere, but she is more readily comprehensible; the elements of which she is made are common and the arrangement piquant" (Simple Story, "Introduction," xvi).

That Miss Milner is in many ways more akin to the new independent woman rather than to the conventional type-character, the embodiment of virtue or the object of a man's desires, is shown in Inchbald's characterization of her. She is not a paragon of moral goodness; instead, she is, as Tompkins notes, "engaged in a struggle with a character, a way of life, and a body of assumptions which are wholly foreign to her" ("Introduction," xv). The contradictory opinions Dorriforth hears of her are all true. On one hand, she is a "young, idle, indiscreet, giddy girl, with half a dozen lovers in her suite"; on the other hand, she is also the generous "benefactress" who sells her "most valuable ornaments" to help a poor family pay a debt (9, 10, 11).

What is most striking about Miss Milner besides her beauty is her ability to manipulate words. Inchbald writes: "she had acquired also the dangerous character of a wit;

...Her replies had all the effect of repartée, not because she possessed those qualities which can properly be called wit, but that what she said was spoken with an energy, an instantaneous and powerful perception of what she said, joined with a real or well-counterfeited simplicity, a quick turn of the eye, and an arch smile of the countenance" (15). This cleverness at social repartée distinguishes Miss Milner from the other women around her. Hiding her real feelings behind often ironic and satiric comments, she is able to participate in a masculine world characterized by power struggles, conquests and smart appearances. Frank W. Bradbrook, writing about women novelists who have influenced Austen, says this of Inchbald's heroine:

Miss Milner bears many resemblances to Isabella, the heroine of Charlotte Smith's The Old Manor House, and to Jane Austen's Emma. All three heroines reflect changes in ideas on woman's role in society, and the contrast with Fanny Burney is extreme. Fanny Burney was a natural conservative in these matters and the older code survived even in her later novels. Her heroines, modelled on those of Richardson, are more or less passive embodiments of virtue, easy victims who needed the protection of their parents, and in their absence, had to be rescued by the hero...

For Fanny Burney, prudence, decorum and modesty were the virtues most necessary in a heroine, and

with these virtues an acceptance of masculine superiority. Miss Milner, Isabella and Emma, on the other hand, partly resemble Congreve's Millamant and Shakespeare's heroines in their wit, and, without being blue-stockings or self-conscious feminists, have some of the confidence and independence of 'the new woman.' (110-111)

Without declaring outright, as Wollstonecraft and Hays had done, that what she is doing is revising the traditional conception of woman, that is precisely what Inchbald is doing in her depiction of Miss Milner. While this independence in a young woman creates an interesting and exciting character, Inchbald was astute enough to realize that these qualities in a girl would not necessarily be the ideal ones for the wife of a domineering and serious ex-priest. The patriarchal structure of the institution of marriage and the family at the end of the eighteenth-century still required a woman to be subservient and submissive to the man. As Miss Milner found it difficult to obey Dorriforth even while he was her guardian, it would be highly improbable to see her character change from that of a capricious, impetuous coquette to that of a docile, sensible wife. Rather than inventing a credible denouement to this tempestuous union, Inchbald resolves the problem by shifting the narrative to the events in the next generation.

Matilda's Innocence and Docility: A Problematic Ideal

As Miss Milner is so obviously an unlikely candidate for the perfect wife, most critics look to the second generation to find what they think is Inchbald's answer to the question left open in the first half--the suitable conduct of a young lady. The two-part structure, with a gap of seventeen years separating the sections, certainly supports such a reading of the novel. In addition, A Simple Story contains several passages, one strategically placed at the end, which suggest that the novel's central theme concerns the "Proper Education" of girls (338).

Because of the novel's construction, critics tend to see Matilda as an ideal, as embodying all the characteristics which her mother, Miss Milner, lacked. Utter and Needham summarize the book as such: "[Inchbald's] Simple Story pointed out in 1791 that the trouble with the old model was her education. The heroine, Miss Milner, is too frivolous for her high-minded husband to do anything with her. That is the thesis of Part I. In Part II, her daughter, Matilda, is better educated, and has the better fortune her author thinks she deserves" (389). Similarly, Gary Kelly examines "Reversals and Parallels" in A Simple Story and sees "the contrast of Miss Milner's education with that of her daughter" as an important "structural principle" (88, 90). Kelly notes that there are many incidents which

are repeated in the second part of the novel which show the difference between the characters of the mother and the daughter. He believes that Matilda is stronger, "has no vanity," and is equipped with "intellectual resources" which her mother did not possess (90), and that she attempts to "atone for her mother's error" (73).

An eighteenth-century reader who disagrees with such a view is the critic in the Analytical Review, possibly Wollstonecraft, who says:

Mrs. I[nchbald] had evidently a very useful moral in view, namely to show the advantage of a good education; but it is to be lamented that she did not, for the benefit of her young readers, inforce it by contrasting the characters of the mother and daughter....to have rendered the contrast more useful still, her daughter should have possessed greater dignity of mind. Educated in adversity she should have learned (to prove that a cultivated mind is a real advantage) how to bear, nay, rise above her misfortunes, instead of suffering her health to be undermined by the trials of her patience, which ought to have strengthened her understanding. Why do all female writers, even when they display their abilities, always give a sanction to the libertine reveries of men? Why do they poison the minds of their own sex, by strengthening a male prejudice that makes women

systematically weak? We alluded to the absurd fashion that prevails of making the heroine of a novel boast of a delicate constitution; and the still more ridiculous and deleterious custom of spinning the most picturesque scenes out of fevers, swoons, and tears.

(Todd, Wollstonecraft Anthology, 226-7)

In examining women's role in the novel, I find that I am more inclined to agree with the early critic's observations than with the more recent ones who see Matilda as the female paragon or model. In certain ways Matilda is perfect, but perfect only because she so nicely fits into the male ideal of what a woman should be. Though she resembles her mother in "person, shape, and complexion," she was not like her in character. She was "softened by the delicacy of her sex, the extreme tenderness of her heart, and the melancholy of her situation" (220). Her reaction to the "full length portrait of Lord Elmwood" links her more closely with the typical delicate, fragile heroine of the day than with the original character which Miss Milner was: "to this picture she would sigh and weep; though when it was first pointed out to her, she shrunk back with fear, and it was some time before she dared venture to cast her eyes completely upon it" (220). These feelings of pity and terror roused by the mere painting of her father are reminiscent of the responses of helpless princesses in Gothic romances.

What I am suggesting in studying the difference between

Miss Milner and Matilda is that the second heroine seems to be a compromise of some kind. The biographical information about the production of the novel supports my speculations. The original version, comprising only the Miss Milner and Dorriforth love story, was rejected by Stockdale in 1779 (Simple, xxix). By 1789 Inchbald was working on a more conventional story and decided to fuse the two. The success of her plays up to this point must have made her aware of what sort of things audiences enjoyed. In fact, in her preface to the novel, she writes that instead of "heavenly inspiration," the Muses have sent her "NECESSITY" (2) as a motivation for creation. She welcomes Necessity as her "all-powerful principle" (2). If necessity has forced her to write, it may have had some influence in the shaping of the second part. Matilda's character, a more delicate and docile one than that of Miss Milner, may have been Inchbald's way of making her novel more acceptable to the reading public.

In her other works Inchbald shows that she was conscious that domestic happiness often entailed the sacrifice of self-will on the part of woman. She knew that the spirited and independent Miss Milner, a character based on herself, was not the kind of person who would make a dutiful wife. In her play called Wives as they were, and Maids as they are (1797), the ideal wife is again the subject of discussion. Lady Priory, who has been taught by her protective husband to practice "humble docile obedience"

and "to pay respect to her husband in every shape and every form," (I,i,p.2) says to a libertine: "Sir, I speak with humility, I would not wish to give offence, but, to the best of my observation and understanding, your sex, in respect to us, are all tyrants. I was born to be the slave of some of you--I make the choice to obey my husband" (IV, iii, p.11). This attitude of conscious resignation on the female part characterizes the second half of A Simple Story. The irony of this position is that Inchbald seems to be saying that if men would rather have insipid, spiritless, docile women for wives, then, by all means, let all women study to be so.

I am not suggesting that Inchbald considered Miss Milner an ideal partner. But certainly in the not so simple stories of the mother and daughter, the issue of womanhood, the feminine character in relation to men, is not as straightforward as some critics have argued. While Matilda does possess many qualities which are more desirable in a wife--she has, after all, not been corrupted by fashionable tastes, but has been educated by the austere and virtuous Miss Woodley and Sandford--yet, one cannot compare her to her mother without feeling a sense of loss. The ideal woman conceived by the patriarchal ideology involves a suppressing of certain aspects of the female self, of spontaneity, of sprightliness and, perhaps, even of passion.

Part Two: Gothic Elements and the Manipulation of Power

Though Inchbald, like other revolutionary novelists of the 1790s, saw the need for reform in various aspects of society, she did not have an entirely negative or pessimistic view of the ways things were. Her comedies and her novels almost always end happily, suggesting an implicit belief in the triumph of goodness and virtue. Francoise Moreux aligns Inchbald with "le courant humanitaire" which, according to Moreux, developed at the same time as sentimental drama, and seeks to promote social justice and to denounce abuses. Unlike Godwin's Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams, and Wollstonecraft's The Wrongs of Woman; or, Maria which depict a bleak, brutal world, Inchbald's literary works present a more hopeful, benevolent, and essentially redeemable universe.

In A Simple Story, instead of dwelling on the misery and disappointment of the dissolution of Lord Elmwood and Miss Milner's marriage, Inchbald changes the focus of the tale to the unnatural repudiation of Matilda by Lord Elmwood, and later, the happy reconciliation of the father and his daughter. This shift in interest is paralleled by a modification of the novel's genre, from social comedy to the gothic novel. Only within the confines and conventions of the latter form is Inchbald able to write a satisfactory conclusion to the novel.

The second half of the work contains many elements of the Gothic novel, in particular, those of setting, plot and character. It opens with Lady Elmwood dying in "a large gloomy apartment...by the side of a dreary heath...in a lonely country on the borders of Scotland" (199). After her death Matilda and Miss Woodley are granted permission to live in Elmwood Castle, arriving on "a dark evening in the month of March" (219). We are told that "Dorriforth, the pious, the good, the tender Dorriforth, is become a hard-hearted tyrant" (194-5). He has turned into one of those horrid, authoritative fathers of Gothic fiction, as Miss Woodley observed: "he was no longer the considerate, the forbearing character he formerly was; but haughty, impatient, imperious, and more than ever, implacable" (230).

Like her namesake in The Castle of Otranto, Matilda is told to obey unnatural orders and subjected to terrifying experiences while living with her capricious, dominating father. Because of Lady Elmwood's infidelity, Lord Elmwood forms the "unshaken resolution, never to acknowledge Lady Matilda as his child,...never to see, hear of, or take one concern whatever in her fate and fortune" (202). After his wife's death, he lets Matilda live in his house, but on the condition that she never come into his sight. He also orders the whole household "never to mention his daughter, any more than his late wife" before him (253). These commands are unreasonable and unnatural, all the more so as they are given by a man who "was by nature, and more from

education, of a serious, thinking, and philosophic turn of mind" (201).

Inchbald undermines the supposedly rational and logical judgement of the male authority figure by showing how ridiculous and selfish his resolutions can be. For Lord Elmwood is not only the father of Matilda, he represents the ideals of the priest, the guardian, and the lord. In this novel, but to a greater extent in Nature and Art, Inchbald illustrates how power and authority can be abused by those in command. In both novels, the first victims are the helpless and the totally dependent women and the poor. Matilda, through no fault of her own, is deprived of her inheritance and her proper place in the family. Edwards, "an elderly man...of honesty and sobriety, and with a large indigent family of aged parents, children, and other relatives, who subsisted wholly on the income arising from his place" is dismissed from his job as gardener of the estate because he "unthinkingly" mentioned Lady Elmwood in front of Lord Elmwood (271).

That Lord Elmwood's severe commands and self-restraint deprive others, as well as himself, of happiness is evident in Inchbald's description of his conduct. He has to control and suppress his real feelings in front of those around him at all times, unable to speak of the subject that is closest to his heart. Several instances show the true direction of his thoughts about his daughter. On one occasion, Sandford tells Matilda, "it is my firm opinion, that his thinking of

ye at present, is the cause of his good spirits....yet he will not allow himself to think that, is the cause of his content" (225). Lord Elmwood believes that his sentiments proceed from "his weakness" (225). Yet he cannot refrain from assisting Miss Woodley to select books for Matilda from his library: "One author he complained was too light, another too depressing, and put them on the shelves again; another was erroneous and he changed it for a better; and thus he warned her against some, and selected other authors; as the most cautious preceptor culls for his pupil, or a fond father for his darling child" (272-3). Kelly points out that "the final simile in the passage is a kind of deliberate Freudian slip: it both describes Lord Elmwood's behaviour, and draws attention to the fact that it is in fact the reverse of 'fond'" (Jacobin, 76).

When the inevitable accident occurs, and Matilda literally "falls into her father's arms," Elmwood's "long-restrained tears now burst forth" and "he cried out eagerly to recall her" (274). But at the appearance of the servants, he assumes once again his uncaring posture, "delivered his apparently dead child; without one command respecting her, or one word of any kind; while his face was agitated with shame, with pity, with anger, with paternal tenderness" (274). He represses his love for his daughter, going so far as to even fulfill his vow of sending her away, and abandoning her.

Only when the libertine, Lord Margrave kidnaps Matilda

does Lord Elmwood feel threatened, and fulfills his paternal duty. Inchbald resorts to what Kelly calls "the Gothic novel machinery of abduction" to reconcile the estranged family (Jacobin, 92). In the gallant rescue of Matilda, Lord Elmwood finally "prove[s] [himself] a father" (324). Matilda feels "excess of joy" at their reunion: "these were the happiest moments she had ever known--perhaps the happiest he had ever known" (328,329). For the third time in his life, love, "that produces wonders, that seduces and subdues the most determined and rigid spirits, had...overcome the inflexibility of Lord Elmwood" (251). Matilda, with her filial love, heals the wound inflicted by her mother, and closes the breach between Elmwood and his heart.

Tompkins says of this part of the novel: "The second half of A Simple Story is full of keen observation of behaviour and lively dialogue, but its main situation, however theatrically effective, is not soberly credible. It is constructed at a remove from nature, out of fantasies and fashionable postures" ("Introduction," xiii). While it is true that the second half is more stylized, it is also perhaps the best way out of a potentially tragic situation. Through literary conventions, the Gothic instead of the realist tradition, Inchbald was able to reaffirm her belief in human goodness, in the importance of feeling and in the positive aspects of women.

A Simple Story as Romantic Revolutionary

When Inchbald's first novel is examined under the matrix I have developed for romantic revolutionary writers such as Wollstonecraft and Hays, it hardly seems radical in comparison. Unlike the novels scrutinized earlier in this study, A Simple Story does not contain passages which question woman's problems or condition directly. In fact, particularly in the second part of the story, it seems to subscribe to the male-dominated ideology, in its reinstatement of the tractable and dutiful Matilda as Elmwood's daughter and rightful heir.

The reason for the inclusion of the novel in my thesis is that A Simple Story, in its own indirect way, does raise many of the same issues as the works of the more militant writers. The two-part structure, as I have already indicated, calls attention to the difference between the two female protagonists. Implicitly, the novel points out the pervading attitude of the community towards women. The independent female cannot and does not find a place in the social order; it is only the submissive, docile ones who do. The novel's happy ending is possible only because there are women who are compliant and who cheerfully submit their wills to male authority and power.

As well, the novel re-evaluates the case of the adulterous woman. Miss Milner's actions are shown to be a

product of her education and her experience, not as a consequence of her sex or sexuality. As Kelly says, "A Simple Story...bears out one of the central tenets of the English Jacobin philosophy, that 'the characters of men originate in their external circumstances'" (Jacobin, 83). This belief is a departure from the traditional belief that women err because it is in their nature to do so, or that women have a more debased essence. The thirteen years passed in penitence and exile more than compensate for Lady Elmwood's momentary lack of self-control and judgement. Inchbald describes her as "guilty, but not hardened in her guilt" (197), showing a tolerant, forgiving attitude to the infidel. This sympathy to the plight of the "fallen" woman is evident also in Inchbald's next novel, and in her rendition of Kotzebue's Lovers' Vows (1798), where the audience is made to feel pity for Agatha, the dishonored woman.

Finally, A Simple Story, like the other novels in this study, is concerned with the importance of feminine sensibility and feeling. One's estimation of a character should not be solely based on external action or appearance but also on his or her inner motives or spirit. Virtue, goodness of heart, can manifest itself in different ways, and kind deeds can sometimes be a result of this intuitive sympathy, rather than from masculine reason or logic.

ii. Nature and Art

Inchbald's second novel is more polemical and radical than her first. Nature and Art (1796), described by Kelly as "Inchbald's thoroughly Jacobin novel," is no longer a simple story, but a novel of purpose (Jacobin, 85). Its title when initially completed was a "Satire upon the Times."⁷ Influenced by Thomas Holcroft and William Godwin, who both read the novel in manuscript form, Inchbald used her second piece of fiction to attack the corrupt ways of aristocrats and the clergy. In particular, she showed that women were more grievously injured than men by the wealthy and powerful in society.

As its title suggests, Nature and Art achieves its didactic purpose through contrasts. Using the noble savage or Gulliver-like, simple perspective of Henry, who is brought up in Nature, the artful society of eighteenth-century England is exposed. As in A Simple Story, the novel does not end with the death or marriage of the two protagonists, but the narrative extends to the concerns of the next generation. This structure shows Inchbald's desire to study the implications of a certain set of beliefs and actions not only on the characters themselves, but in their progeny. As in her first novel, the two-generational structure points out the importance of education and external circumstances on an individual.

Unlike the other texts of this study, Nature and Art does not have a major female heroine. But the sub-plot or story of Hannah Primrose, the cottage girl seduced by William, becomes increasingly more significant, such that by the end of the novel it almost takes over the narrative. Through Hannah's tale, Inchbald, like Wollstonecraft in The Wrongs of Woman, calls attention to the plight of the poor uneducated woman. Hannah, who falls victim to William's gallantry, is rejected by every member of society until she is left with no alternative but prostitution. This interpolated tale in Nature and Art aligns Inchbald with other romantic revolutionary novelists who saw the need for reform of society as a whole, and specifically in customs and laws dealing with women.

My study of the novel points out the objects of the author's satire, shows her concern for the needs of the poor, her detailed examination of one woman's history, and concludes with the solution Inchbald proposes for the ills she sees in eighteenth century England.

Such Things Are

Nature and Art (1796), like Wollstonecraft's second work of fiction written around this time, is a novel of purpose, designed to show things as they were. The object of satire--the ecclesiastics, and, especially the English aristocrats--was commonly the butt of ridicule in Inchbald's comedies. In I'll Tell You What (1785), Appearance is Against Them (1785), Everyone Has His Fault (1793), and The Wedding Day (1794), Inchbald makes fun of the amorous intrigues of the upper class. But in a more thoughtful vein, in plays as Such Things Are (1787), Next Door Neighbours (1791) and Lovers' Vows (1798), Inchbald points out the insensitivity of the rich to the plight of the poor and the oppressed. While in these dramatic pieces there is a good-humoured, if somewhat fortuitous, resolution to the problems presented, in Nature and Art the abuse of power and negligence of the needy by the wealthy is shown to have serious and detrimental consequences.

Inchbald does not differentiate between the nobility and the clergymen. In Nature and Art they are depicted as equally self-centered, materialistic, irresponsible and hedonistic. Both are in the upper echelons of society and wield their power only to benefit themselves. The corrupt nature of this group of people produces reverberations in the society they live in: their wives, their children and the community around them are all affected by their actions.

The two-generational structure of the novel highlights the extension of their influence.

Right at the beginning of the novel, Inchbald shows the irony behind the kinds of things this social circle values. The brothers William and Henry are unable to find work while they repeat "their mean accomplishments of honesty, sobriety, humility" (I, 7). William, who understood Greek and Latin, and who "had been educated at a free grammar-school...and was an excellent scholar," could not find employment with a young clergyman. He is rejected by the divine, "because he could not dress hair" (I, 7). The patrons and lords do not ask about William's learning, but if he "could play any instrument or could sing" (I, 17). Fortunately, the younger brother, Henry, though illiterate, "could play upon the fiddle" (I, 8), and manages to support not only himself but to see William educated as a clergyman. His fiddling so charmed a nobleman that William received a living of £500 a year.

That this society welcomes only those who can entertain or "dress hair" is a good indication of its moral values and mentality. The means by which William obtains his deanship, and rises in his profession shows the perversity and debasement of the church. The ecclesiastical world is not different from other institutions of power. Reward is given not to those who merit it but to those who are personal favourites, those who fawn and flatter. William is successful in his career because he associates with

influential people. He becomes intimately friendly with his bishop and they "passed their time in attending levees and in talking politics" (I, 44). He would do anything to gain "noble acquaintance," even to the point of letting his sermons and writings be taken for the bishop's (I, 88).

Inchbald stresses that these practices are the result of art rather than nature. After William obtains his position, he becomes ashamed of his fiddling brother. The natural bond between them is broken by William's "prosperity" (I, 28). Henry sets sail for Africa and is shipwrecked among savages. Inchbald uses this separation to further enhance the difference between the two brothers and their sons. Away from English society, Henry teaches his son, also named Henry, charity and humility. William's son, on the other hand, is taught to be clever, and to live by the rules of rank and fashion. "Young William passed his time, from morning till night, with persons who taught him to walk, to ride, to talk, to think like a man--a foolish man, instead of a wise child, as nature designed him to be" (I, 45).

Eventually, young Henry is sent back to England. Without the prejudice of a civilized education, he observes the manners of his uncle's family from a naive, noble savage-like perspective. His simple comments comprise much of the novel's criticism of late eighteenth century upper class and clergy. Through him Inchbald expresses her disapproval of fashionable customs, from serious faults to

frivolous follies. For instance, young Henry, rather humourously, does not know whether to bow to his uncle or his uncle's wig first, as his uncle seemed to put so much importance to the "great white thing which grows upon [his] head" (I, 63). When the dean explains that wigs are worn "as a distinction between us and inferior people: they are worn to give an importance to the wearer," Henry replies: "That is just as the savages do; they stick brass nails, wire, buttons, and entrails of beasts all over them to give them importance" (I, 64-5). Henry's comparison reduces the pretensions of people like the dean, enabling the reader to see their superficiality.

Henry's inadvertent "misconception and misapplication of many words" (I, 80) results in a more somber comment on civilized life. Like Swift's Houyhnhnms, Henry's vocabulary does not allow for euphemisms or equivocation: "He would call compliments, lies--Reserve, he would call pride--Stateliness, affectation--and for the monosyllable war, he constantly substituted the word massacre" (I, 81). Henry is unable to see the difference between a war and a massacre as in both cases, people who do not want to die are killed.

Similarly, Henry cannot understand why there are poor people in England. The dean writes a pamphlet praising the nation's "salubrious air, fertile fields, wood, water, corn, grass, sheep, oxen, fish, fowl, fruit and vegetables" (I, 99). Yet, at the same time, he informs Henry that there are

"poor creatures who have not a morsel, or a drop of anything to subsist upon, except bread and water" (I, 100). When Henry asks why the poor cannot partake of earth's luxuries, he is told that "they must not," and that nothing the earth produces belongs to the poor (I, 101). Inchbald implies that while nature provides, it is the artificial distinctions of rank and class which deprive people of what they should be entitled to.

In another instance, the dean tries to instruct Henry in the difference between the rich and poor in society. He tells Henry that "the poor are born to serve the rich" and when they do so, "they will be rewarded in a better world than this" (I, 77-78). The justification for the system is that "God has ordained it" to be so (I, 79). Gary Kelly notes that this passage exposes "the Evangelical defence of the status quo" which was commonly couched in precisely these terms (Jacobin, 105). Along with other romantic revolutionary novelists such as Wollstonecraft and Smith, Inchbald sees through the hypocrisy inherent in these comforting platitudes. The dean's practice of "rigid attention to the morals of people in poverty, and total neglect of their bodily wants" (I, 153) is hardly an adequate means of alleviating the conditions of the poor. Unlike the dean who "forced [the poor] to attend church on every sabbath;" but cared not "whether they had a dinner on their return," Inchbald was very aware of social realities, of things as they were in England in the 1790s (I, 153).

Inchbald's satire is not confined to the male species; she is equally critical of the women of high society. Just as Wollstonecraft and Williams do, Inchbald condemns women who are full of affectation and artifice. Her portrait of the elder William's wife, Lady Clementina, shows her disapproval of the vain and coquettish lady of fashion. All of Lady Clementina's actions, like Williams' Mrs. Seymour's, are intended for display:

If she complained she was ill, it was with the certainty that her languour would be admired; if she boasted she was well, it was that the spectator might admire her glowing health; if she laughed, it was because she thought it made her look pretty; if she cried, it was because she thought it made her look prettier still.--If she scolded her servants, it was from vanity, to show her superior knowledge to theirs...(I, 34).

Inchbald, like Wollstonecraft, is commenting not only on the women who are pretentious, but also on the society which tolerates and encourages such behaviour. After all, the dean and his friends are proud of Lady Clementina's frivolity and ostentation.

Though the wife of a clergyman, Lady Clementina is very much a socialite. She "ran from house to house, from public amusement to public amusement, but much less for the pleasure of seeing than for that of being seen" (I, 89). Inchbald points out that there is no difference between the

religious and the secular world here, as the dean and his wife, along with the rest of high society, are concerned with reputation and rank. Lady Clementina becomes the subject of scandal sheets. She comes home one day lamenting: "My reputation is destroyed--a public print has accused me of playing deep at my own house, and winning all the money" (I, 92). Ironically, the horror stems not from the guilt of her gambling, but from the defamation of her character in public.

Vanity literally kills Lady Clementina. She loses her life as a result of her rage for fashion: "she caught cold by wearing a new-fashioned dress that did not half cover her, wasted all away, and died the miserablest object you ever heard of" (II, 174). Inchbald, though she had access to the society of the rich, never tried to imitate their ways. She always valued practicality and good sense above frivolity and fashion.

Just as Lady Clementina's character is a type, representative of the kind of pleasure-seeking wealthy woman, so is Lord Bendham, the Lord of the Bedchamber. Though Gary Kelly asserts that Lord Bendham was modelled on George III (Jacobin, 98), Lord Bendham and his wife are also typical aristocrats, absorbed only in themselves. Both the peer and his lady feign personalities to suit the needs of the company they are with. Inchbald writes: The "Lord of the bed-chamber must necessarily be...one, wholly made up of observance, of obedience, of dependence--and of imitation--a

borrowed character--a character formed by reflection" (I, 120). Similarly, "the wife of this illustrious peer,...took her hue, like the chameleon, from surrounding objects; her manners were not governed by her mind, but were solely directed by external circumstances" (I, 120). Lord and Lady Bendham's actions do not come from their hearts or minds; they are purely for show. As we have seen in A Simple Story, Inchbald was critical of this kind of affectation; she believed in the importance of real feeling and sensibility.

Because her priorities are placed on superficial appearances and distinctions of class and rank, Lady Bendham's morals are inconsistent: "it was not...the crime, but the rank which the criminal held in society, that drew Lady Bendham's vengeance: she even carried her distinction of classes in female error to such a very nice point, that the adulterous concubine of an elder brother was her most intimate acquaintance, while the less guilty unmarried mistress of the younger, she would not sully her lips to exchange a word with" (I, 123). This kind of attitude to social rank is precisely the reason why there is such a gap between people of different classes. One of the main tenets of these romantic revolutionary women novelists was to challenge and subvert the existing hierarchical social order. Through exaggeration, Inchbald calls attention here to the falsity of distinctions which arise from one's status.

Aside from their pretentiousness, the most serious crime of the aristocrats is the misuse of their wealth. As in the play, Next Door Neighbors (1791), the families of the rich and the poor are juxtaposed and contrasted with each other. While the wealthy gamble away their money, feast in sumptuous banquets, the indigent barely have enough to subsist, to pay their rent. For all his preaching, Dean William "did...nothing at all for the poor" (II, 176). One of his parishioners said that he "used to send the poor to the workhouse. His dogs...fared better than we poor" (II, 177).

Similarly, Lord and Lady Bendham are indifferent to the needs of the poor. While they themselves are constantly in debt, living beyond their means, they wonder "how the poor might live most comfortably with a little better management" (I, 125). Lady Bendham believes that the needy should be "much obliged" to the rich for their charity. Henry, on the other hand, sees it as "the greatest hardship of all" that "what the poor receive to keep them from perishing, should pass under the name of gifts and bounty" (I, 128). Inchbald, like Henry, thinks that "Health, strength and the will to earn a moderate subsistence, ought to be every man's security from obligation" (I, 128). Like Wollstonecraft in The Wrongs of Woman, Inchbald in Nature and Art perceives that the answer to the problem of the needy is not the paltry hundred pounds of charity that the Bendhams condescend to give a year, but the opportunity for

employment. That work gives man a sense of dignity is the reason behind the much debated end of the novel.

Again Inchbald criticizes the system which perpetuates repression and obligation: "In this country, people of a certain class are so educated they cannot exist without assistance, or what is called the patronage of others; when that is with-held, they steal or starve" (II, 31). As can be seen in the irony behind these lines about the younger William, Inchbald does not consider charity to be the solution to the difficulties of the impoverished: "He was the president of many excellent charities; gave largely; and sometimes instituted benevolent societies for the unhappy: for he delighted to load the poor with obligations, and the rich with praise" (II, 145). Those who benefit from charity are the rich who feel comforted and satisfied with their good works.

Inchbald adds a rather sardonic touch in the demise of Lord Bendham: "They told of Lord Bendham's death from the effects of intemperance; from a mass of blood infected by high seasoned dishes, mixed with copious draughts of wine--repletion of food and liquor, not less fatal to the existence of the rich, than the want of common sustenance to the lives of the poor" (II, 192-3). Gary Kelly points out that such extravagance would have been bitterly accepted as the "novel was published in the year after the terrible famine of 1795" (Jacobin, 103).

Feminization of the Problem

Towards the second half of the novel, the story shifts from the difference between William and Henry and their sons to the plight of Hannah Primrose,⁸ the cottage girl seduced by the younger William. That Inchbald was aware of the change in direction of her narrative is shown by her interjection: "Reader of superior rank, if the passions which rage in the bosom of the inferior class of human kind are beneath your sympathy, throw aside this little history" (I, 138). She encourages the "unprejudiced reader, whose liberal observations are not confined to stations, but who consider all mankind alike deserving...investigation" (I, 139), to read on, "in hopes that the remainder of this story may deserve...attention, just as the wild herb of the forest, equally with the cultivated plant in the garden, claims the attention of the botanist" (I, 139). She deliberately equates the rich and the poor as deserving the reader's attention and concern, in direct contrast to the attitudes of the characters in her own novel, the Bendhams and the Dean. Interestingly, the latter part of the work also focuses on a female instead of predominantly male characters.

In this section, the good-humoured satiric tone disappears, and in its place is a more serious, perhaps even tragic voice. The vanity and selfishness of the rich has

serious implications for the society they live in. As Mona Scheuermann notes: "William's carefully detailed destruction of Hannah becomes a symbol of the callousness, cruelty, and stupidity with which the upper class acts in relation to those less powerful than themselves" (189). For William, though he claims to have made use of "no unwarrantable methods...made no false promises--offered no pretended settlement--vowed no eternal constancy" (I, 148), does take advantage of the difference between his own and Hannah's education and background. Deliberately, he obtains "her heart, her whole soul entire--so that loss of innocence would be less terrifying [to her] than separation from him" (I, 145). After William gets what he wants from her, he orders her never to see or speak to him again.

Inchbald then writes almost entirely from Hannah's point of view. Instead of abandoning her, or calling her by such conventional terms as the fallen woman or the depraved wretch, Inchbald sympathetically follows Hannah's story, from the expulsion from her family and her community to her last moments. Through the pathetic account of the girl's thoughts and movements, Inchbald exposes the inhumanity and indifference of society, and presents Hannah very much as a victim of the powerful social machine.

Ironically, the people who most condemn Hannah are those who are directly or indirectly responsible for her condition. Henry accidentally finds the baby abandoned by Hannah in the forest and brings it home. William reacts by

saying: "Its mother...ought to have been immediately pursued, apprehended and committed to prison" (II, 27). Lord and Lady Bendham, concerned as usual with appearances, proclaim the seducer "a vicious youth, without one accomplishment to endear vice....this youth sinned without elegance; without one particle of wit, or one atom of good breeding" (II, 36). The only one who defends the mother is Henry, who observes: "the father was most deserving a prison, the poor woman had abandoned only one--the man, in all likelihood, had forsaken two" (II, 27).

Inchbald shows the facility with which the wealthy manipulate power. Once Hannah confesses to the Dean that the father of the child is William, the incident is hushed up, and the name of William is left unscathed. The Dean dismisses the case as an "affair of some little gallantry" (II, 70), and Hannah is soon forgotten by the aristocrats. The victimized woman and her child are deserted; Hannah is left to deal with her conscience as well as the care and support of the infant.

What is innovative about Inchbald's story of seduction is not the actual events, but the detailed depiction of the woman's thoughts and feelings after her "fall." Inchbald considers Hannah worthy of her reader's attention, and spends time describing her state of mind. The cruelty of William's abdication of responsibility is made more poignant by the contrast between his and Hannah's life following their separation. William marries the niece of the Bendhams

and continues to move up the social ladder. Hannah, on the other hand, is ostracized by the village, moves to London, and is eventually forced to become a prostitute.

Passages such as these are indicative of Inchbald's sympathies. Hannah, journeying towards London, reflects:

William! In your luxurious dwelling! Possessed of coffers filled with gold! Relations, friends, clients, joyful around you! Delicious viands and rich wines upon your sumptuous board! Voluptuousness displayed in every apartment of your habitation!--Contemplate, for a moment, Hannah, your first love, with her son, your first, and only child, walking through frost and snow to London, both may perish for the want of a friend. (II,101)

Again, when Hannah passes William's house, she meditates:

"Ah! there he sleeps in quiet, in peace, in ease--he does not even dream of me--he does not care how the cold pierces, or how the people persecute me!--He does not thank me for all the lavish love I have borne him and his child! His heart is so hard, he does not even recollect that it was he, who brought me to ruin" (II, 131).

Inchbald does not equate Hannah's loss of innocence with the loss of her virtue. Though Hannah is no longer respectable in men's eyes, Inchbald writes about her "principles of virtue" which "the loss of virtue had not destroyed" (II, 107). Like the other novelists in this study, Inchbald questions the apparent transparency of the

meaning of words, especially in relation to woman. In Nature and Art, words such as honour, moral excellence and piety in relation to the Dean and William acquire a dubious signification, while others, such as virtue and chastity, when used negatively in association with Hannah, lose their traditional connotation.

To show the extent of the injustice and inequality of the system, Inchbald has William destroy Hannah not once, but twice. By the end of the novel, he has risen to become a court magistrate. In her desperation and poverty, Hannah steals and gets caught. She is brought before the bench of Judge William. By now, her appearance is so different that William does not recognize her. He pronounces her sentence--death, and Hannah is then executed. Before she dies, she writes William a letter of appeal, but as her jailors believed it merely to be the ramblings of a lost woman, it does not reach William in time. Thus, as Scheuermann says, "William's seduction of Hannah is not, as he and his family would have it, merely a youthful indiscretion; it is murder" (194). Hannah's tragic end is a culmination of the crimes perpetrated by the rich and powerful against the lower classes.

Retreat into Nature: A Romantic Conclusion?

After exposing the corruption of the clergy and the aristocrats, after the tragic death of Hannah, the emblem of the victimized lower classes, Inchbald then terminates her novel with rather idyllic, romantic end. The younger Henry returns with his father from the savage lands following an absence of nineteen years. He marries his childhood sweetheart, Rebecca Rymer, who remains the same, as "it was her mind which had gained her Henry's affection; that mind had undergone no change, and she was the self-same woman he had left her" (II, 190). Together, they withdraw from society and form a self-sufficient, paradisaal community of their own. Settling in a "hut, placed on the borders of the sea" (II, 196), they fish, raise poultry and tend a garden.

This retreat into nature seems to provide a facile solution to the problems presented in the earlier sections of the novel. Scheuermann says that Inchbald's "social vision collapses" and that the book "simply comes up short in its own failed vision" (10). She finds the ending "simplistic" and "absurd" (195, 197). Gary Kelly sees the end of Nature and Art not as a failure, but as part of the English Jacobin novelists' tendency to transform "ideas of general reform" into "the romance of sympathy." The "literary Jacobins" were "reluctant to engage in direct political action" because of the events of 1794, "the

Treason trials and the nation-wide conservative reaction," as well as the excesses of the French Revolution (Jacobin, 111, 112). Kelly also sees sympathy as a "characteristic response of women" and says: "It is a fair assessment of Nature and Art to see it as deliberately offering a woman's solution to the ills of the age, the 'condition of England'" (Jacobin, 112).

While there is something to be said for both Scheuermann's criticism and Kelly's explanation of the retreat, the ending of Nature and Art can be read in a far more positive way than either of these two scholars have done. The rustic society established by the two Henrys and Rebecca implies a beginning, a victorious regeneration of the disintegrating society. In the corrupt world dominated by such people as the Williams and the Bendhams, the virtuous must dissociate themselves, withdraw to where they are secure from the abuses of power. While the novel contains examples of the helplessness of the individual, Inchbald now suggests that human beings have a certain freedom of action. The Henrys and Rebecca will not change the world through overt political action, but they can exert an influence by their commendable model of living.

In many ways, the conclusion of Nature and Art is similar to the end of Voltaire's Candide, another eighteenth century work exposing corruption and evil in the world. Kelly has noted that there are links between Inchbald's second novel and Candide, but has not related the two

endings. In Voltaire's philosophical tale, after Candide undergoes his many adventures and misadventures, he finally settles down with his little group of friends and together they cultivate their garden. The most prominent philosopher of Turkey advises them that work is the answer, for work removes the three great evils of life--boredom, vice, and need.

In Inchbald's novel work is likewise praised. Inchbald seems to be echoing Voltaire's thoughts: "Labour gives a value to rest, which the idle can never taste; and reflection gives to the mind content, which the unthinking never can know" (II, 198). The younger Henry concludes: "I once...considered poverty a curse--but after my thoughts became enlarged, and I had associated for years with the rich, and now mix with the poor, my opinion has undergone a total change--for I have seen, and have enjoyed, more real pleasure at work with my fellow labourers, and in this cottage, than ever I beheld, or experienced, during my abode at my uncle's; during all my intercourse with the fashionable, and the powerful of this world" (II, 198-9). In this energetic pronouncement lies the ultimate practical answer to the world's problems. Thus, Nature and Art, offering work as the healthiest occupation for the human mind, ends on a note of courage, not despair.

The conclusion, then, is a triumphant reversal of the situation found at the beginning of the novel. For the younger Henry, unlike his father, no longer has to rely on

the patronage and generosity of others to earn his living. Henry vows: "While I have health and strength, I will not take from any one in affluence, what only belongs to the widows; the fatherless, and the infirm" (II, 194). Inchbald describes their situation as "exempt both from patronage and from controul" (II, 196). What the little society has achieved is dignity and independence. The community finds happiness, not through an idealized or romantic retreat, but because, within its modest limits, it has a direct social purpose; it is practical and productive. Above all, it functions co-operatively, recognizing and promoting man's capabilities and his humanity.

Notes to Chapter IV

¹ James Boaden, Memoirs of Mrs. Inchbald, ii.152-3, as quoted by Gary Kelly, English Jacobin Novel, 78.

² I am using the terms "classical" and "modern" here as defined by Foucault in The Order of Things.

³ It is not my intention to review Locke's theory of knowledge, nor his Essay Concerning Human Understanding, nor the specific influence of Locke on Inchbald. However, I assume that Inchbald would have known this important eighteenth century work.

⁴ Except such obvious ones, as The Massacre (1792).

⁵ This article is reprinted in William McKee's Elizabeth Inchbald Novelist, 153-163.

⁶ Though critics accept Boaden's surmise that Miss Milner is modelled after Inchbald herself, she is also a typical coquette--beautiful, witty and vain. G.L. Strachey sees a relationship between Miss Milner and Madame de Clèves (Bradbrook, 109). Tompkins suggests that Matilda bears similarities to Manfred's daughter in Horace Walpole's The Castle of Otranto (Simple Story, 344 notes).

⁷ Boaden, i.328, as qtd. by Kelly, Jacobin, 94, n.l.

⁸ In certain editions her name is Agnes Primrose.

Chapter V

CHARLOTTE TURNER SMITH

Perhaps the most popular and prolific of the five women novelists in this study, Charlotte Turner was born in London on the fourth of May 1749. Her happy and carefree childhood at Bignor Park, Sussex ended at fifteen, when her father, Nicholas Turner, then considering a second marriage himself, thought it expedient to marry off his daughter to Benjamin Smith. Smith, six years her senior, was the second son and business partner of Richard Smith, a wealthy West India merchant and a director of the East India Company. From this disastrous marriage stemmed much of Charlotte Smith's troubles.

During the first year of their married life Charlotte was forced to attend to her invalid mother-in-law, the second wife of Richard Smith. After her death in 1766, Charlotte cared for her father-in-law, who also suffered from poor health. At the same time she had to contend with problems of her own. By seventeen, two years after her marriage, Charlotte Smith had given birth to two children, and had suffered the loss of her eldest son who died a year after he was born. Financial difficulties then arose. With his wild schemes and speculative projects, Benjamin Smith soon dissipated the family fortune. The death of his father

did not alleviate matters as his estate was tied up in a complicated will which led to lawsuits, delays, and squabbles.

In 1783 Benjamin Smith was imprisoned for debt. Charlotte Smith left their nine children in her brother's care and accompanied her husband to jail for part of the seven months. In order to support him and her family, Smith, encouraged by William Hayley, decided to publish the poems she had been writing. Elegiac Sonnets, and Other Essays appeared in May 1784 and was an immediate success. Its popularity can be attested to by its having gone through eleven editions, as well as a second volume by 1797. The book firmly established Smith as a respected poet well before she became popular as a novelist.

In 1785 Smith gave birth to the twelfth and last of her children in Dieppe. Because of Mr. Smith's creditors, the family by then was obliged to move to Normandy. Here Smith worked on a translation of the Abbe Prevost's Manon Lescaut which was published that year. Another translated work, The Romance of Real Life, from the French of Pitaval followed in 1787. Charlotte Smith's first novel, Emmeline, or the Orphan of the Castle, which Jane Austen's Camilla Stanley prefers to "any of the others,"¹ came out in 1788. It received much contemporary praise. Hayley was quoted as observing that Emmeline, "considering the situation of the author, is the most wonderful production he ever saw, and not inferior, in his opinion, to any book in that

fascinating species of composition." ² Sir Walter Scott praised it as a "tale of love and passion, happily conceived, and told in a most interesting manner" (Ehrenpreis, "Introduction," Emmeline, vii). Sir Egerton Brydges called it an "enchanted fiction with a new kind of delight" and wondered about the author: "How a mind oppressed with sorrows and injuries of the deepest dye, and loaded with hourly anxieties of the most pressing sort, could be endowed with strength and elasticity to combine and throw forth such visions with a pen dipped in all the glowing hues of a most playful and creative fancy, fills me with astonishment and admiration" (qtd. by Hilbish, 131).

A number of novels followed at the rate of almost one a year for the next decade: Ethelinde: or the Recluse of the Lake (1789); Celestina: a novel (1791); Desmond, a novel (1792); The Old Manor House (1793); D'Arcy: a novel (1793); ³ The Wanderings of Warwick (1794); The Banished Man (1794); Montalbert: a novel (1795); Marchmont: a novel (1796); and The Young Philosopher (1798). At the same time Smith also wrote poetry and prose narratives. The Emigrants: a poem (1793) was inspired by William Cowper and his poem The Task. She composed a series of moral tales designed for children: Rural Walks, in Dialogues for Young Persons (1795); Rambles Farther (1796); Minor Morals (1798); and Conversations Introducing Poetry, for the Use of Children (1804). After the destruction of a fleet of seven ships off the coast of Portland in November 1795, she

commemorated the event in A Narrative of the Loss of the Catharine, Venus, and Piedmont Transports and the Thomas, Golden Grove, and Aeolus Merchant Ships near Weymouth (1796). Near the close of her life, she attempted such diverse works as Letters of a Solitary Wanderer (1799), which contained various narratives; History of England, in a Series of Letters to a Young Lady (1806); Beachy Head (1807) and The Natural History of Birds (1807).

One must remember that throughout this period of her writing, Smith was struggling virtually alone. Though she and her husband continued to correspond, and she frequently supplied him with money, they had separated amicably from each other since 1787. She had to support and care for her large family, her health was declining, and she was still engaged in a lengthy litigation over various property settlements. Her life and achievements inspired many who knew her. William Cowper, who met her at Eartham in 1792, described her as "an amiable agreeable woman, interesting both by her manners and her misfortunes" (Letters, IV, 172). Both Romney and Cowper were astonished at the speed with which she worked as an author. In a letter to his cousin, Lady Hesketh, Cowper says of Smith: "None writes more rapidly or more correctly. 20 pages in a morning, which I have often read and heard read at night, and found not a word to alter" (Letters, IV, 249). Indeed, Cowper understandingly sums up her life when he made these observations to Hayley:

The living, and they who live unhappy, they are indeed subjects of sorrow. And on this account poor Mrs. Smith has engrossed much of my thoughts and my compassion. I know not a more pitiable case. Chain'd to her desk like a slave to his oar, with no other means of subsistence for herself and her numerous children, with a broken constitution, unequal to the severe labour enjoin'd her by necessity, she is indeed to be pitied. It is easy to foresee that notwithstanding all your active benevolence, she will and must e'er long die a martyr to her exigencies. I never want riches except when I hear of such distress. (Letters, IV, 281).

Charlotte Smith, author of twenty-six different literary works, died on October 28, 1806.

A Cautious Revolutionary: Subverting Without Offending

Compared to the novels of radical women writers such as Wollstonecraft and Hays, Smith's works are more conservative and, to a greater extent, similar to the traditional sentimental novel in plot and structure . Florence Hilbish, her biographer, writes:

Critics place Charlotte Smith either among or on the outer circle of the London novelists known as the Revolutionary group, consisting of Thomas Holcroft, Elizabeth Inchbald, Robert Bage, Amelia Opie, Mary Wollstonecraft, and William Godwin, who was the greatest. Experiences of Mrs. Smith as one of those wronged by existing causes back of some of the doctrines of this group and her feminine desire for edification not only made her a sympathizer of the oppressed but an advocate for reform. But her subordination of theory to plot removes her from within to the edges of the Revolutionary circle. (297)

The difference between Smith and the others is that her novels were not primarily novels of purpose. They were meant rather to please and entertain a general public as well as to make money. As the subsistence of her family depended on the popularity of the novels, Smith had to be careful about the subject matter she chose. Her experience

with the translation of Manon Lescaut taught her that not all topics were acceptable to the public, that English morals were not as liberal as the French,⁴ for example.

Nevertheless, Smith held views which aligned her closely with the revolutionaries. According to Hilbish, like them, she believed that "poverty and ignorance are due to unjust laws and that marriage is the sole concern of the individuals united or to be united" (297). Other feelings and beliefs which she shared with the Revolutionary circle are summed up by Hilbish as: "democracy, which included abolition of privilege owing to birth, sympathy for the American colonists and French, hatred of war and prejudice; humanitarianism toward the prisoner, beggar, insane and slave; 'return to nature,' protesting against the artificiality and luxury of civilized life...and educational reform, advocating freedom of thought, reason, and will to abolish ignorance and prejudice" (297). Most important for this study, like the writings of the other romantic revolutionary women, Smith's novels portray the restrictions, the oppression of women, and try to revise traditional concepts of the ideal and the virtuous female in several ways.

Unlike Wollstonecraft or Hays who had the characters and the plot revolve around or actually embody the social thesis of the novel, Smith uses more covert and indirect methods. Often she would express her disapproval of the system through minor characters, through digressive stories

within the narrative proper, or through comparisons and metaphors. Hilbish, who notes that "histories of characters of secondary or minor rank disrupt every novel" (427), does not see the subversive implications of the stories of subordinate characters. In fact, she says that "digression is another of Mrs. Smith's chief faults" (426). What the stories do in Smith's works is decentralize the novel. Rather than a single, centralized story about the main character or characters, plurality of voices and multiplicity of action best describe Smith's novels. While seeming to conform to the dominant ideology, then, her novels actually succeed in articulating many of the same issues of female discontent as those raised by the more radical writers.

Since I am not undertaking a full-scale study of Smith, I have selected only three novels--her first, one from the middle period, and her last--as representative of her works. I am not interested in the "progress" of her writings, as I do not believe Smith's novels get progressively better, or worse.⁵ Many of them were written in great haste in order to pay off debts. Rather, these three best exemplify Smith's attitude to the plight of woman and illustrate her particular method of subversion. They pass innocently, using Sir Walter Scott's words, as "tale[s] of love and passion, happily conceived, and told in a most interesting manner," but in reality contain many serious social critiques.

i. Emmeline, or The Orphan of the Castle

Egerton Brydges, speaking of Charlotte Smith's novels, writes:

What are the traits which characterize every heroine delineated by her pen? An elevated simplicity, an unaffected purity of heart, of ardent and sublime affections, delighting in the scenery of nature, and flying from the sophisticated and vicious commerce of the world; but capable, when necessity calls it forth, of displaying a vigorous sagacity and a lofty fortitude, which appals vice, and dignifies adversity.⁶

This description of Smith's female characters is quite accurate. Indeed, her heroines are so nearly perfect that they irritated Jane Austen, who saw these faultless characters as unnatural. In her own work, notably in Northanger Abbey, Austen made fun of these conventional heroines. Catherine Morland is a deliberate inversion of Emmeline, as Mary Lascelles has pointed out in Jane Austen and Her Art (60). While Emmeline, without any formal education, has acquired "literary" tastes, learned to play the harp, and has a genius for drawing, Austen's Catherine, on the other hand, could never learn anything before she was taught, could not play any instrument, and was deficient

with the pencil.

While this rosy depiction of the flawless heroine and her subsequent fortunate destiny seems to indicate a lack of insight or naïveté on Smith's part, we know from her own experiences that she was under no such delusion. Her own life was a constant struggle and she was aware that neither skill nor talent nor rich suitors came easily. While her beautiful and gifted heroine does live a Cinderella-like tale--a penniless orphan turns into heiress and marries her prince--taken in the context of the work as a whole, the story is not as unrealistic or as idealistic as it first seems.

What Smith does is place Emmeline's happily-ever-after story in the foreground, but at the same time, she has other women's more sorrowful tales in the background. Because of the need to please a large audience, Smith cleverly constructs her novel to read like other conventional romances, but she also manages to raise some important problems related to women. Emmeline befriends Mrs. Stafford and Lady Adelina, and it is through the stories of these women that Smith points out the need for reform in the social system. Mrs. Stafford's history shows the plight of the intelligent woman who is united to an insensitive brute, while Lady Adelina's case examines adultery from the woman's point of view.

Thus, there is some justification in Katherine Rogers' observation that Smith's novels "centered on an insipid

heroine, and we must look for interest and realistic life in peripheral areas" ("Inhibitions," 68). However, Rogers overstates the case when she says that because of the heroine's chastity, prudence, modesty and extreme youth, "she is too dull to engage our interest and sympathy, as well as too unreal" (65). This comment may be true of Monimia in The Old Manor House, but it is certainly not applicable to Emmeline. Emmeline proves herself worthy of our sentiments and attention on several occasions.

Though penniless and friendless, she has a high sense of honour and self-esteem. First of all, she refuses the offer of marriage from the steward Maloney, "astonished at his insolence in daring to lift his eyes to a person bearing the name of Mowbray" (27). She repeatedly rejects Frederic Delamere's invitation to run away with him although he professes to adore her. Her ability to reflect and to reason distinguish her from the other silly girls in the novel such as Miss Ashwood, who "had learned all the cant of sentiment from novels; and her mama's lovers had extremely edified her in teaching her to express it. She talked perpetually of delicate embarrassments and exquisite sensibilities, and had probably a lover, as she extremely wanted a confidant;...Of the 'sweet novels' she had read, she just understood as much as made her long to become the heroine of such a history herself" (229). Smith differentiates between such girls and Emmeline, making Emmeline much more sensible than romantic. Her thoughts on

becoming Delamere's wife show her sound understanding and judgement:

Splendid as his fortune was, and high as his rank would raise her above her present lot of life, she thought that neither would reconcile her to the painful circumstance of carrying uneasiness and contention into his family; of being thrown from them with contempt, as the disgrace of their rank and ruin of their hopes; and of living in perpetual apprehension lest the subsiding fondness of her husband should render her the object of his repentance and regret.

The regard she was sensible of for Delamere did not make her blind to his faults; and she saw, with pain, that the ungovernable violence of his temper frequently obscured all his good qualities. (73)

Perhaps Charlotte Bronte's friend, Julia Kavanagh, best describes Emmeline: "in Charlotte Smith's books the new heroine is fully evolved, a quiet, steadfast, sensitive girl, whose virtue is modesty and her strength endurance, whose character is ripened by adversity and love, and who solaces her worst hours with the contemplation of nature and the English poets."⁷ Unlike Wollstonecraft and Hays, then, Smith was not a radical revolutionary. Her heroines did not reject all sexual distinctions in conduct and values, nor did they openly declare their sexual passion.

But Smith did contribute to the changing image of woman in the novel by creating a female character who could boast of "nobleness," "strength of mind," "dignity of manner," and who, while she herself was not free from pecuniary worries, always expressed an active sympathy for other women in distress.

Mrs. Stafford Rights the Balance: An Ounce of Subversion

In the history of Mrs. Stafford, Charlotte Smith gives an example of woman's oppression in conjugal life. The case is so closely based on the facts of her own life, that Smith was criticized for her unfavourable portrayal of her husband in Mr. Stafford. The poet Anna Seward, who thought Smith's sonnets "a mere flow of melancholy and harmonious numbers, full of notorious plagiarisms, barren of original ideas and poetical imagery" ⁸ wrote this after reading the first novel of a rival literary lady: "Whatever may be Mr. Smith's faults, surely it was as wrong as indelicate to hold up the man, whose name she bears, the father of her children, to public contempt in a novel" (qtd. by Ehrenpreis, "Introduction," Emmeline, viii). Seward's charge of Smith's indelicacy may be true, but it was precisely exposition of the unpleasant "truth" of many domestic arrangements that Smith desired. The Stafford story illustrates a woman's helplessness and powerlessness once she enters the marital state.

Like the other romantic revolutionary writers, Smith was aware of the illusory pleasure of marriage as the ultimate goal for all womankind. Though many of her novels end with traditional nuptial bliss, this closure must be read in the context of her own life, as well as the digressive sub-histories of other women in the novels. The

inclusion of Mrs. Stafford's unhappy conjugality in *Emmeline* makes visible women's frustrations and disappointments. Trapped as a writer as her characters are trapped as women, Smith may not have invented a new ending for her heroine, as Williams and Hays did, but she nevertheless articulates her dissatisfaction with the social, economic and psychological reality of marriage.

In *Emmeline* Smith shows that as a wife, an adult female must completely submit to the whims and wishes of her husband, even though she may possess more wisdom and judgement than he. Such is the situation of the Staffords: "To a very superior understanding, Mrs. Stafford added the advantages of a polished education, and all that ease of manner, which the commerce of fashion can supply. She had read a great deal; and her mind, originally elegant and refined, was highly cultivated, and embellished with all the knowledge that could be acquired from the best authors in the modern languages" (43). Mr. Stafford, on the other hand, was "ever in pursuit of some wild scheme," and was "fond of improvements and alterations" which never amounted to anything but expense for his family (44, 190). Among others, his projects included trying to manure land with old wigs, and acquiring a large collection of Canary birds.

Smith sums up the life of the mis-matched couple:

Mr. Stafford was one of those unfortunate characters, who having neither perseverance and regularity to fit them for business, or taste and genius

for more refined pursuits, seek, in every casual occurrence or childish amusement, relief against the tedium of life. Tho' married very early, and tho' father of a numerous family, he had thrown away the time and money, which should have provided for them, in collecting baubles, which he had repeatedly possessed and discarded, 'till having exhausted every source that that species of idle folly offered, he had been driven, by the same inability to pursue proper objects, into vices yet more fatal to the repose of his wife, and schemes yet more destructive to the fortune of his family. Married to a woman who was the delight of her friends and the admiration of her acquaintance, surrounded by a lovely and encreasing family, and possessed of every reasonable means of happiness, he dissipated that property, which ought to have secured its continuance, in vague and absurd projects which he neither loved or understood; and his temper growing more irritable in proportion as his difficulties encreased, he sometimes treated his wife with great harshness; and did not seem to think it necessary, even by apparent kindness and attention, to excuse or soften to her his general ill conduct, or his 'battening on the moor' of low and degrading debauchery. (177)

Like Wollstonecraft in The Wrongs of Woman, Smith shows that

it is the female who suffers most in such a situation. At one point in their lives, Mrs. Stafford is reduced to either following "her husband to a prison, or prevail[ing] on him to go to the Continent while she attempted anew to settle his affairs" (301). Smith lets Mrs. Stafford speak at length about her afflictions, demonstrating that not only is the woman affected by the degradations of her physical conditions--her clothing, food and shelter--but that she has to undergo mental and moral agony as well.

In explaining her pitiful circumstances to Emmeline, Mrs. Stafford not only articulates female oppression, but also implicitly condemns the society which tolerates such injustices:

But think what it is for one, born with a right to affluence and educated in its expectation, with feelings keen from nature, and made yet keener by refinement, to be compelled...to solicit favours, pecuniary favours, from persons who have no feeling at all...and to bear with humility a rude refusal. I have endured the brutal unkindness of hardened avarice, the dirty chicane of law, exercised by the most contemptible of beings; I have been forced to attempt softening the tradesman and the mechanic, and to suffer every degree of humiliation which the insolence of sudden prosperity or the insensible coolness of the determined money dealer, could inflict. Actual poverty, I think,

I could have better borne....(458)

This domestic situation, taken from Smith's own life, occurs again in *Desmond*; where the intelligent and delicate Geraldine is married to the crass spendthrift Verney. In both cases, the husband totally ignores the needs of his wife and children and continues with his debauched and excessive way of living.

Smith's radicalism, then, is expressed not so much in direct statements or espousals of reform, but in her sympathetic portrayal of female suffering and her sensitive depiction of women's experience. Characters such as Mrs. Stafford, while not advocating as extreme solutions as those of Emma Courtney, for example, nevertheless pointed to the same injustices in the social system. By simply embedding Mrs. Stafford's disagreeable experience in the midst of Emmeline's conventional romance, Smith disrupts the easy flow of fantasy by hard truth. Neither Smith, nor Emmeline, nor even Mrs. Stafford, demands the reform of marriage and property laws, but by permitting Mrs. Stafford to speak, and by having Emmeline listen sympathetically, Smith draws her reader's attention to the need for reform. Mrs. Stafford's story, then, is perhaps more than an ounce of subversion against the weight of traditional concepts of marital bliss and the perfectibility of domestic relationships.

The "Fallen" Woman Reconsidered: Lady Adelina

Another digressive story which gives the negative side of the marriage issue is that of Lady Adelina. As in the case of Mrs. Stafford, this tale is about a woman in distress. Emmeline and Mrs. Stafford meet Lady Adelina by accident while she is hiding in the country away from her relations. Because she is friendless, troubled, and expecting a child, Emmeline and Mrs. Stafford decide to do what they can to help her, "to soften the calamities" of the "unhappy mourner" (225). Eva Figes, who sees similarities between Smith's Emmeline and Fanny Burney's Cecilia, points out that the incident with Adelina illustrates the difference between Smith's and Burney's fictional world. Figes observes: "no Burney women would have been allowed to be friends with a pregnant woman...Smith's heroines constantly express active sympathy for women in distress" (64).

Hilbish says that the story of Adelina presents "contrasts in characters," as the "virtue of Emmeline and Godolphin" are emphasized "against the impurity of Fitz-Edward and Adelina" (427). While it is true that the reader is meant to see differences in the characters, Smith does not condemn Adelina for her "impurity," as Hilbish implies. What Smith does with the Adelina account is to give the female side of a "fallen" woman story. Through

this narrative, she revises traditional conceptions of the promiscuous adulterous wife by showing how a combination of circumstances can lead to a lapse in conduct. One of the factors which contributes to the unhappy events is the disastrous early marriage of Lady Adelina to the worthless Trelawny. Adelina, at fifteen, "just out of the nursery, where [she] had never been told it was necessary to think at all," consents to wed the first gentleman who dances with her at the request of her father (211). After the nuptials, Trelawny "was continually with young men of fashion," went "on tours to distant counties to attend races or hunts," neglected his wife and spent their fortune (214, 216). As a result, Adelina, left alone, falls in love and becomes involved with Fitz-Edward who "behaved to [her] with the tenderness of a brother" (219), and who cared for her while her husband flees to France to escape his creditors.

It must be made clear that Smith was by no means encouraging infidelity in wives. Another incident of adultery later in the novel is plainly denounced. Lady Frances, who, because of vanity and boredom, embarks openly on an affair with the Chevalier de Bellozane is disciplined for her indiscriminate actions. Lady Adelina's intimacy, on the other hand, is more understandable and, in some ways, inevitable. Smith's attitude to her indiscretion and subsequent disgrace, as shown by Emmeline and Mrs. Stafford, is not so much rejection and condemnation, as compassion and sympathy. Adelina's self-reproaches, her fear of a duel

between her brother and her lover, her guilt, and her unwanted pregnancy seem to be punishment enough. Emmeline, at the risk of her own reputation, accompanies Adelina to Bath where the baby is born. Her kindness and helpfulness towards another woman in distress are signs of true charity and are commended by Smith.

Another revolutionary aspect of the Adelina tale is its ending. Smith allows the fallen woman to have a happy end, and does not doom her to a tragic death or to a life of prostitution because of her fatal mistake. For Smith as for the other romantic revolutionary authors, the morality of sexual conduct is a complex matter, and a woman's moral worth does not depend on the preservation of her chastity. Adelina is not "virtuous" in the conventional sense, yet she is not "corrupt" either. Smith's sympathetic depiction of her case encourages readers to be more understanding and compassionate. Near the end of the novel her husband Trelawny dies, and Fitz-Edward, who has never stopped thinking of Adelina, returns. Smith finishes the book with the suggestion that after a suitable interval, Adelina will consider Fitz-Edward's proposal, and begin a happier life with him.

Digressions and the Romantic End

The stories of Mrs. Stafford and Adelina elevate Emmeline above the normal sentimental novel. While it is true that the novel ends traditionally--the heroine meets and marries her worthy man at the end--Emmeline as a whole provides readers with more than mere romance and diversion. The digressive tales demonstrate the difficulties women face. Through them, Smith, without overtly advocating reform, like Wollstoncraft or Hays, shows her concern that a woman is completely dependent in all areas of marriage--domestic, financial, and legal--on her husband. In exploring the problems that can arise when a marriage partner is not carefully chosen or when a girl is coerced into matrimony too young, Smith raises revolutionary and complex issues which align her closely with the other novelists in this study.

In addition to making the public aware of certain issues, the digressions also make Emmeline's resolute character more credible. She learns from the negative experiences of Mrs. Stafford and Lady Adelina and then acts accordingly. At one point when Delamere tries passionately to persuade her to meet and marry him secretly, she refuses as "she had lately seen in her friends, Mrs. Stafford and Lady Adelina, two melancholy instances of the frequent unhappiness of very early marriages; and she had no

inclination to hazard her own happiness in hopes of proving an exception" (230). Not only the readers, then, but Emmeline as well; are expected to profit from these other female narratives.

ii. Desmond, A Novel

Published in 1792, four years after Emmeline, Desmond represents a departure from Smith's earlier novels. It is overtly political and more revolutionary in tone and spirit than the others. That the writer was aware of the difference in this book is shown by the Preface in which she says: "I feel some degree of that apprehension which an Author is sensible of on a first publication...in sending into the world a work so unlike those of my former writings" (I, i). There are several reasons for her doubts. First, as Bowstead observes, Desmond is "the only epistolary novel among the ten Smith published between 1788-1798" ("Epistolary Novel," 237). Instead of the traditional story of a single man courting a single woman, as in Emmeline, it is about "a young man, nourishing an ardent but concealed passion for a married woman" (I, ii). Lastly, Desmond contains many arguments about the political situation in France and England, which Smith felt might displease some of her readers.

One reader the novel did not please was Sir Walter Scott, who had earlier expressed admiration for Smith's Emmeline. He thought Desmond a poor work, and wrote in March 16, 1826, "In the evening, after dinner, read Mrs. Charlotte Smith's novel of Desmond--decidedly the worst of her compositions."⁹ Nevertheless, it had some influence on him; he borrowed from it, according to Leigh Hunt, "the

foundation of his character of Waverley, and the name besides" (qtd. by Turner, 118).

The reason for Scott's dislike of the novel and its general unpopularity is probably because of its radical nature. In Desmond, Smith does more than merely exploit the then current fever of interest in the French revolution by using it as a topical and exciting background; she uses the revolution to draw a disconcerting parallel between political and domestic tyranny. Smith likens the despotic and oppressive rule of France's absolute monarchy over its people to Verney's authority over Geraldine. Just as power is misused in the state, so it is similarly abused in the family.

In addition to its polemical statements about women in the home, in Desmond Smith depicts some unusual and unconventional kinds of love relationships. The hero's infatuation with a married woman, though controlled and regulated, is nevertheless unorthodox and untraditional. His subsequent amorous relationship with the married Madame Josephine de Boisbelle shocked contemporary readers. Through these uncustomary arrangements, through the stories of the two females, Geraldine and Josephine, Smith explores various aspects of female passion, sexual freedom and desire. Her provocative suggestion that a woman's yearnings for emotional fulfillment do not necessarily end at marriage links her with Wollstonecraft; probably the most radical writer of this study.

Tyranny: At Home and Abroad

The hero Desmond provides the connection between the seemingly irrelevant observations about the French people and the situation of one particular household in England. Because of his ardent passion for the married Geraldine, Desmond decides to leave for the continent, hoping that "the present political tumult in France, ... may interest and divert [his] attention" (I, 11). Diana Bowstead points out that "Smith's choice of the epistolary form has to do with the largely political and didactic import of the novel, and with advantages letters seemed to her to have over authorial narration in accomodating so weighty a burden of information" ("Epistolary Novel," 238). She says: "Quite overtly, by way of the 'sentiments'--that is, the ideas and opinions--expressed by each of the correspondents, the domestic tyranny of which Geraldine Verney, the putative heroine, is an acquiescent victim is treated as analogous to political tyranny in France prior to the Revolution" (237).

Smith takes advantage of the current interest in the French revolution and uses the example of the corrupt monarch and the aristocrats to illustrate the abuse and misuse of power. Once she establishes the injustice of despotism, she then draws parallels between the situation in governments and the situation at home. Thus the first part of the novel seems to be composed of unrelated episodic

vignettes of people who possess wealth and power both in England and France. These people are presented for the most part as self-centered, irresponsible, ignorant, and materialistic.

A striking example is the character of Lord Newminster. He is lazy and obnoxious, and, though a member of the House of Lords, cares not "a curse for their damned politics" (II, 41). He would rather "all the old women in the country should fast for a month," than that his dog should not have its belly full (I, 58). The two prosperous gentlemen whom Desmond encounters at Dover profess to criticize the French for their notion of liberty and for treatment of the clergy. Yet they callously refuse alms to a starving widow and her children, while their political debate regresses to a discussion of game and fish, at home and abroad. When they part, the squire invites the clergyman to partake of a feast of turtle soup, fat ducks and pigeons, all ably prepared by the squire's negro slave. Smith shows the irony of the situation: while ignoring other people's needs, the rich gourmandize and indulge their bodily appetites, exploiting, if necessary, the labour of a human being who has become mere property.

Except for Montfleuri, the titled and well-to-do in France are similarly condemned. The Comte d'Hauteville's dismal estate mirrors his moral degeneration. His habitation has the look of "ill managed cultivation," what used to be an "avenue of beech trees" are now "the ruins of trees,"

while "not a cottage arose to break the monotony of this long line of disfigured vegetation" (I, 203-4). Verney's friend, the Duc de Romagnecourt is "proud, profligate, and perfidious; accustomed to entertain high ideas of self-importance" (II, 276). He thinks that the men who aspire to be freemen are but reptiles, and hopes to see them "languishing out their miserable lives in the most dreary dungeons of the new-erected Bastille" (II, 278). Hardly scrupulous when it comes to women, he believed he could purchase Geraldine's sexual favours with his money.

Though Geraldine's husband, Verney, is not an aristocrat, he is always among them, joining them in their extravagance and decadence. The significance of this association is clear: the men who irresponsibly govern the country, who control the money, are the same who rule thoughtlessly and rashly at home. Like the character of Mr. Stafford in Emmeline, Verney is wild and shiftless, and has squandered the family fortune on hunting, lavish parties, and gambling. His rare visits home cause his wife more pain than pleasure. Geraldine tells Bethel about her husband: "for of the understandings of all women he has the most contemptible opinion; and says, 'that we are good for nothing but to make a shew while we are young, and to become nurses when we are old'" (II, 32). In one instance, he comes home, and instead of greeting his family, sends them away, crying: "away with ye all, there, get ye along to the nursery, that's the proper place for women and children"

(II, 36).

As in Emmeline, Smith's indictment in Desmond of the injustices done to women is an indirect one. She makes her case by displaying instances of gross mistreatment of women and by suggesting parallels between political and domestic corruption. Using Geraldine as an example, Smith shows how the life of a woman of superior understanding and sensibility becomes wasted. Geraldine is treated as an object to be discarded, first by her father and later by her husband. She recalls: "My father, indeed, would not condescend to suppose that our sentiments were worth forming or consulting...he was a very Turk in principle, and hardly allowed women any pretensions to souls, or thought them worth more care than he bestowed on his horses, which were to look sleek, and do their paces well" (III, 133). Perhaps not coincidentally, the unfavourable comparison of women to horses which had been made earlier is repeated by Verney. After stating that women belong to the nursery, Verney changes the subject and asks Bethel if he could buy Bethel's "hellish clever trotting mare" (II, 37). Geraldine acknowledges at one point that she is little better than a possession. Referring to Verney she says, "the unfortunate man whose property I am" (III, 148).

The idea of women as property becomes real and horrifying by the end of the novel. Desmond discovers that Verney, because of his many debts, has abandoned Geraldine and has "literally sold" her to the lecherous Duc de

Romagnecourt (II, 239). Because of Geraldine's sense of duty to the man whose name she bears, she feels compelled to follow his instructions. It is only through a series of misadventures due to the Revolution that she is saved. Thus, Smith completes the thematic connection between the political and the romantic plots in the novel. Both in government and in the home, it is only through a revolution or drastic change that tyranny can be abolished. As Bowstead notes, Geraldine, who had been taken for property, "allies herself in her second marriage to a man of the right political principles. Smith intends her readers to see that the security of Geraldine's position in the household Desmond governs depends on his honest intention to translate his ideological opposition to political autocracy into reasonably democratic domestic policies" (261).

Geraldine and Josephine: Unorthodox Heroines

The structure of Desmond is unlike the typical courtship novel of the late eighteenth century, where an eligible bachelor seeks and wins the hand of a single young lady. In Smith's novel Desmond is in love with a woman who is already married at the onset of the tale.¹⁰ The author explains in her Preface: "in representing a young man, nourishing an ardent but concealed passion for a married woman; I certainly do not mean to encourage or justify such attachments; but no delineation of character appears to me more interesting, than that of a man capable of such a passion so generous and disinterested as to seek only the good of its object; nor any story more moral, than one that represents the existence of an affection so regulated" (I, ii).

A novelty in the 1790s, the story of a woman married to the wrong man became a conventional plot by the 1850s. George Eliot, in "Silly Novels by Lady Novelists," satirizes the typical heroine of such novels. She sums up their plots in this way: the heroine "as often as not marries the wrong person to begin with, and suffers terribly from the plots and intrigues of the vicious baronet; but even death has a soft place in his heart for such a paragon, and remedies all mistakes for her just at the right moment."¹¹ While it is true that Smith's Desmond conforms neatly to this

sentimental plot, as Bowstead points out, "the thrust of the novel is nonetheless realistic, radical, and incisive" (237). Rather than using the story to elicit excessive sentimentality, Smith uses her novel to explore various issues related to the adult woman.

The first problem concerning young ladies is the choice of a marriage partner. In Desmond both the heroine, Geraldine, and her foil, Josephine, are the victims of greedy parents who think only of material wealth in choosing a suitable son-in-law. Geraldine tells her sister Fanny: "riches and high birth were ever the most certain recommendations to the favor of my mother--Merit unattended by these advantages, we were always taught to shun" (III, 134). She elaborates: "for every single man of large fortune, though decrepid with age, or distorted by the hand of Nature, though half an idiot from his birth, or rendered worse than an idiot by debauchery, we were taught to throw our encouragement; and, I really believe, if the wandering Jew, or the yellow dwarf, or any other fabled being of hideous description, could have been sent on earth to have personified men of eight or ten thousand a year, we should have found it difficult to have escaped being married to them, if they had offered good settlements" (III, 133-4).

Geraldine's French counterpart, the also unhappily married Josephine de Boisbelle has parents with similar ideas. They have given very little care and thought to the disposition of their daughters. Josephine complains to

Desmond that her mother has "betrayed her into marriage with a man, for whom it was impossible she ever could either feel love or esteem," and that as a consequence, she suffers from "all the miseries of such a connection," and feels that "her life is irrecoverably dashed" (I, 274). In order to be rid of the other two daughters, the parents decide to make them nuns. As part of the revolution against old tradition, Josephine's brother, Montfleuri, has attempted to rescue his sisters from the "odious superstition" of condemning "so amiable a young woman, to so many years of rigid confinement" (I, 201). Smith draws a parallel between confinement in a marriage and in a convent: in both institutions, the woman forfeits her freedom, and in both the authority she submits to is, ultimately, a patriarchal one. Through the multiple female voices, the histories of women in both England and France, Smith stresses the importance of respecting a woman's opinion, particularly in the selection of her life-time partners. Geraldine and Josephine's lives show that, when wedded to the wrong man, being a wife and a mother can mean anything but felicity for the woman. More importantly, they suggest how completely at the mercy of paternal power every woman is, a suggestion that may well work to undermine any redemptive value in the romantic notion of the perfect marriage.

Related to this problem of marital mate is the question of female occupation or function. In her depiction of frustrated intelligent women, Smith calls attention to the

fact that ladies of high society are expected to lead superficial lives. Geraldine, for example, is unhappy with the emptiness of her mother's life. In her mother's estimation, "happiness...consists in being visited by the opulent; in giving and receiving good dinners; in having at Bath, or in London, the reputation of having fashionable parties, and very full rooms; of curtsying, at church, to all the best dressed part of the congregation; and being looked upon as...one who knows the world;...as a person of great sagacity in cases, whether of medicine, or cards, or anecdote" (III, 135-6). Her mother often "takes refuge in cards and company against the reproaches of her own heart" (II, 182). Geraldine on the other hand, finds "solitary walks" extremely pleasant (II, 87), and takes comfort in her "two lovely children" (II, 5). She says: "when [her husband] "is at home, it makes no other difference to me than that of destroying my peace without promoting my happiness" (II, 5). Unlike her mother, Geraldine cannot forget her troubles through card games. The contrast between what Geraldine and her mother think of as the proper function and duty of a wife and mother is very pronounced. Smith, then, points out that for a woman of Geraldine's strength and discernment, one whose "ingenious and liberal mind shrinks from vice and folly" (I, 3), the usual frivolous female amusements are insufficient.

Throughout the novel the author speaks, as Wollstonecraft did, on behalf of women's intellectual

powers. Desmond falls in love with both Geraldine and Josephine not only because of their beauty and sensibility, but because of their judgement and sense. He praises Geraldine for the "strength and clearness of her understanding" (I, 3), and says that Josephine "has much of that sort of knowledge which makes her a pleasant companion" (I, 165). Bethel says at one point: "ignorance and vanity were much more fatal to that happiness which every man seeks, ...when he marries, than that knowledge which has been insidiously called unbecoming in women" (II, 33). Indeed, the only ones who are opposed to women having knowledge in the novel are Geraldine's worthless husband, Verney, and her superficial mother. Geraldine complains: "I never am allowed to converse with any of the literary people I meet, as my mother has a terrible aversion to every thing that looks like a desire to acquire knowledge; and for the same reason, she proscribes every species of reading" (145-6). Part of the reason for both Geraldine and Josephine's unhappiness, then, stems from the limitations and curtailment of their intellectual capabilities. Not only have they been forced to marry men they do not love and respect, they are also prevented from enjoying and exercising their understanding and mental skills in their domestic spheres.

Morality and Immoral Relationships

Perhaps the most important issue concerning women raised by the novel is the question of female needs and fulfillment. Smith challenges the conventional belief that the marital state is the apex of women's life. Through Geraldine's dissatisfaction with her husband, and Josephine's extramarital affair with Desmond, she shows that marriage does not necessarily satisfy a woman's emotional and sexual desires. Geraldine, recognizing her husband's shortcomings and Desmond's merits, asks: "Why should it be wrong to admire and esteem an excellent and amiable man, from whom I have received more than brotherly kindness?--Why, indeed, should I question the propriety of this regard, because I am married?--Does that prevent our seeing and loving excellence wherever found--and why should it?" (II, 255-6). In the more extreme case of admiration, Josephine actually indulges her passion and love for Desmond. In her "gay and unguarded heart," she nurtures an affection for Desmond which finally culminates in her having a child by him (III, 338). In 1792 this illicit relationship was frowned upon by the reviewers of the European Magazine, the Monthly Review and the Critical Review, because it seemed to them to diminish Desmond's character (Bowstead, 248). Bowstead defends the affair by saying that it undercuts the "sentimentality of his devotion

to Geraldine," and that without it Desmond's "relationships with women seem either unrealistically gallant or absurdly adolescent" ("Epistolary Novel," 248). The indiscreet affair shows the dangers and undesirable consequences of marriages made on the basis of economics and materialistic gain. Smith sees the fatal results of such domestic unions and warns against them.

Smith seems to have anticipated the criticisms and charges of immorality levied on the novel by her contemporaries. In Desmond she has Geraldine write to her sister Fanny about the effects of novels on young girls. The sensible Geraldine defends novel-reading against other forms of entertainment. She believes that though novels may exhibit "vice" and even "weaknesses, that deserve not quite so harsh a name," those who are examples of them are subjected "to remorse, regret, and punishment" (II, 166). Scandal sheets, on the other hand, are more corrupt. She says, "circumstances, more inimical to innocence, are every day related, without any disguise, or with very little, in the public prints" (II, 166). In "reading the world, a girl must see a thousand very ugly blots, which frequently pass without censure at all" (II, 166).

In addition, Smith criticizes the theatre as a form of amusement. Geraldine says:

I own it has often struck me as a singular inconsistency, that, while novels have been condemned as being injurious to the interest of

virtue, the play-house has been called the school of morality--The comedies of the last century are almost, without exception, so gross, that, with all the alterations they have received, they are very unfit for that part of the audience to whom novel reading is deemed pernicious, nor is the example to be derived from them very conducive to the interests of morality; for, not only the rake and the coquette of the piece are generally made happy, but those duties of life, to which novel-reading is believed prejudicial, are almost always violated with impunity, or rendered ridiculous by 'the trick of the scene.' (II, 170).

Smith, then, was very much aware of public codes of morality, of correct and incorrect conduct. Her decision to include the Josephine and Desmond affair must be seen as a deliberate one. Its negative example, as a case where parental tyranny causes marital discord, far outweighs its potential corruptive effect.

Another point that Geraldine makes is that not all girls are as silly as people generally believe. Many women have intelligence enough to discern between fantasy and reality. Geraldine, who read "all sorts of books...ever since [she] was out of the nursery," and who "ran through [novels] with extreme avidity, has not been rendered romantic and foolish by her reading. Geraldine testifies: "Had the imagination of a young person been liable to be

much affected by these sort of histories, mine would, probably, have taken a romantic turn, and at eighteen, when I was married, I should have hesitated whether I should obey my friends directions, or have waited till the hero appeared, who would have been imprinted on my mind, from some of the charming fabulous creatures, of whom I had read in novels.--But far from doing so, I was...very obedient, and...I have thought only of being a quiet wife, and a good nurse; and of fulfilling, as well as I can, the part which has been chosen for me" (II, 174-5). Thus, reading has not corrupted Geraldine's morals; rather it has increased her understanding. Her knowledge has made her aware of her restrictive position as a wife and a woman, and enabled her to articulate her unhappiness to the readers of her tale.

iii. The Young Philosopher

In a letter to her publisher, Cadell and Davies, dated June 27, 1797 Charlotte Smith wrote of The Young Philosopher: "...from the nature of the plan it will require books and leisure. I meant to have call'd it "The Young Philosopher"--& I thought some of the ideas that occur'd to me of character and incident were likely to be work'd up into a composition of some novelty & of more solidity than the usual crowd of Novels."¹² The Young Philosopher, Nature his Law and God his Guide (1798), as suggested by the title, is "of more Solidity than the usual crowd of Novels," as Smith says. It is largely based on Rousseau's idea that the primitive state is superior to the civilized one. Allene Gregory, in The French Revolution and the English Novel, points out that this novel marks the third stage of English Revolutionism--from initial sympathy with the French reformers, to reaction against the excesses of Robespierre, and finally to a reflective overview of the revolution as a whole. Gregory says that by 1798, Smith "has lost faith in reform, and is now a philosophic Revolutionist" (222).

What is interesting about the novel from the point of view of this study is not so much its Rousseauistic philosophy as its concern with abuse and injustice, especially in relation to women. In the Preface Smith says,

"If a Writer can best describe who has suffered, I believe that all the evils arising from oppression, from fraud and chicane; I am above almost any person qualified to delineate" (I, iii-iv). Smith mentions Wollstonecraft, the author of The Wrongs of Woman, as "a Writer whose talents I greatly honoured, and whose untimely death I deeply regret" (I, v). Like the more outspoken radical, Smith does not agree with the conventional system of education for young ladies, and attempts to suggest an alternative method for her heroine in the novel. She also points out through the adventures of Mrs. Glenmorris the very limited rights and freedoms of the adult woman .

She asserts that her intention "has been to expose the ill consequences of detraction; to shew the sad effects of parental resentment, and the triumph of fortitude in the daughter" (I, vi-vii). The Young Philosopher repeats a theme of Desmond: a society in which high birth and wealth fashion the marriage contract is one that is bound to produce families with much marital discord and unhappiness. But unlike the ending of Desmond where the hero and heroine are able to be reconciled with the society, the Young Philosopher's end is more similar to Inchbalds' Nature and Art. The morally good characters must withdraw from the community and start another one of their own, this time, in the primitive "wilds" of America.

The Evils of the Civilized World

Like many of the other romantic revolutionary women writers, Smith satirizes certain aspects of eighteenth century English society. The most notable of her targets are lawyers, who were also the main subject of her scorn in the novel published just prior to The Young Philosopher, Marchmont (1796). While in Marchmont it is the male protagonist, Marchmont, who is perpetually the prey of the vampire-like attorneys, in the later work the victims who suffer the most are the females, namely, Mrs. Glenmorris and her daughter, Medora.

Another group Smith criticizes in the novel are tyrannical parents and relations, who see rank and fortune as the only merits in people. Smith shows how the love of material wealth has made the civilized city life a breeding ground for inhumanity and injustice. Virtues which are natural to human beings, such as compassion, sincerity and benevolence, have become foreign to the artificial society with its perverted values. For this reason, George Delmont, who "lived according to the dictates of his own reason rather than according to [the world's] fashions" (I, 28), and Medora, who is "a child of nature" (I, 244), decide to leave England for a more primitive and simple land.

At first glance, the two groups Smith satirizes--lawyers and parents--seem to have nothing to do

with each other. But in Smith's opinion, what they both have in common is certain unjustifiable power over individuals, especially over helpless females. Parents exert unreasonable authority when they ignore their children's wishes and force them into alliances in which social standing and wealth are the only factors considered. Armitage, the philosophic, old sage in the novel says: "I am no advocate for very early or very hasty marriages; but it is because they are often made by the tyranny or the avarice of parents" (I, 249). Legal advisers, on the other hand, can manipulate people by misleading them, or withholding and regulating what should rightly belong to them. Smith says in Marchmont that the system of justice is such that "the best of all possible laws are abused, to the very worst of all possible purposes" (II, 215).

In Mrs. Glenmorris' narrative, which occupies most of the second volume, we have a compendium of the abuses women suffer at the hands of these two groups of people. First of all, as the younger child of the house, Laura is ignored by her ambitious parents who seek to aggrandize the family by marrying off the eldest daughter with a great dowry to a baronet. While her sister is to succeed to their great possessions, Laura is to be "sacrificed to some old man, who, in consideration of [her] youth and beauty, will take [her] without a fortune" (II, 22). Here Smith shows how the love of grandeur and wealth can sever close familial relationships; can break the bonds of parent to child, and

sister to sister.

Even after she is married, Laura Glenmorris is still beseiged by domineering relations, both by Glenmorris' witch-like old great aunt, Lady Kilbrodie, and by her own mother and sister. Lady Kilbrodie's "pride and her poverty had made her avaricious; not for herself,...but in the hope of aggrandizing her two sons" (II, 97). She sees Laura as a threat because she might bear an heir to the Glenmorris estate, so she holds her prisoner in her Highland castle and menaces her with superstitious portents of death. No sooner free from that captivity, Laura, on returning to London, is confined in a madhouse on her mother's orders. Her mother, Lady Mary de Verdon, permitting no sentiment to stand in her way, hopes to prevent Laura and her daughter from claiming the part of the inheritance they are entitled to.

These opportunistic parents are aided and encouraged in their mischief by lawyers, whom Smith portrays as greedy creatures willing to do anything for money. The professionals who are supposed to uphold the laws of the land are corrupted by desires for self-aggrandization. Mr. Petrify, the solicitor whom Mrs. Glenmorris goes to see for temporary financial assistance is one "whose heart seemed callous to every impression but those made by his own pursuit after money...He was naturally cold and repulsive...He said, these were times when a man might well be justified in refusing pecuniary help even to his own father (III, 96-7). Significantly, law is a particularly

masculine field. Not only were all lawyers male, but their technical discourse is designed specifically to exclude people--some men, but all women--who are not members of the profession. Naturally, Smith does not reduce the attack on lawyers to a gender conflict, but the fact remains that that profession she spent so much time criticizing was an institution which consisted solely of men.

A host of other legal advisers, some with names appropriate to their nature, such as Cancer and Loadsworth, are similarly motivated by avarice. Smith gives another portrait of a degenerate lawyer in Brownjohn: "Not supported by the regular practice of his profession, but living by shifts, he contrived by impudence, and a flourishing way of talking, to pass himself off as a man of fortune....Destitute of every principle, and totally without feeling, he made no scruple of taking money from two adverse parties" (III, 103-9).

All these lawyers "had long preyed together on the unfortunate" (III, 109). They are led by Sir George Appulby, who was also an attorney, but now a consequential politician. Like his partners, he "had been in habits of taking advantage of every body who by any chance fell in his power; and had for the most part done it with impunity....He had robbed, and helped to rob his own relations, and since had as successfully robbed the public" (III, 276-7). Out of all these descriptions of men in the legal profession, there is not one who presents a positive or redeemable side to the

occupation. Smith's own experience with solicitors and the Chancery courts convinced her that almost everyone in the field was dishonest and corrupt.

Because the novel is such a strong denunciation of the faults of late eighteenth century English society, it seems to suggest that there is no hope for the civilized city. The "good" characters in the book, the philosophers and thinkers, are outcasts. Armitage is a hermit, and by the end, George Delmont has decided to leave his estate at Upwood and join the Glenmorris family in America. Like Inchbald, Smith implies that the only way to remain an honest human being in such a vicious society is to live apart from it.

Glenmorris, the victim of much ill-treatment, has the last word. He justifies his intention of returning to America: "I do not love to be in a country where I am made to pay very dear for advantages which exist not but in idea. I do not love to live where I see frightful contrast between luxury and wretchedness; where I must daily witness injustice I cannot repress, and misery I cannot relieve" (IV, 391). Hilbish notes that "the reference to America...was another property of the Revolutionists and one in which Mrs. Smith was in the lead of many of her contemporaries" (314).

The retreat to America, to "nature," is Smith's way of rebelling against traditional narrative endings. While George, the worthy hero, does ultimately marry the beautiful

heroine, Medora, this marriage is not accompanied by a reintegration into society, accompanied by an automatic financial gain. Rather, George, the young philosopher, has to make a break with his past, with civilization, at least temporarily, to allow the natural instincts of benevolence, love and compassion to rule his life once more.

Domestic Pedagogy: Mothers and the Education of Children

In The Young Philosopher Smith points out the difference mothers can make on the characters of their children. The novel pairs off sets of youths and shows the contrasts between one who has been brought up according to the dictates of fashion, and one who has benefitted from the personal care and teaching of the mother. Though the stress is on the instruction of females, Medora and Miss Goldthorp, Smith also devotes some time to the schooling of males, George and Adolphus Delmont.

In the case of George and his brother, Adolphus, the disparity is evident. Upon becoming his own master, George "lived very much out of [the world,] and according to the dictates of his own reason rather than according to its fashions" (I, 28). Since he was five years old, his mother kept him at home and instructed him herself. She "made him a Philosopher," with "a set of opinions of his own" (I, 34). She "seemed to have in her hands the heart of her son, to be able to mould it as she pleased, and the use she made of her power was to teach him to reason on every thing he learned, instead of seeing all objects, as they are represented, through the dazzling and false medium of prejudice, communicated from one generation to another" (I, 86-7). From her, George acquires his abhorrence of war, seeing it not as a path to glory but as a means of being a "successful

destroyer of his fellow men" (I, 87). Thus, after examining the options that lay before him, George "determined to yield his freedom to none of those motives which the love of power or of wealth might hold out to him, but to live on his little farm unfettered by the rules he must submit to if he entered into any profession" (I, 92).

On the other hand, his elder brother, Adolphus, a favourite of his father and his uncle, Lord Castledanes, "had never felt a wish that he did not imagine he had a right to gratify" (I, 46). Brought up as the heir to a noble house, he was used to being courted and praised by his relations, his tutor, his servants and his dependants. At the death of his parents, he received ten thousand pounds, and his brother merely three, but he still "thought it scandalous that in any country, the younger branches of a family should be suffered to diminish the property of the elder" (I, 135). When he gambles away all his property, he does not hesitate to call upon George to pay his debts. Hilbish notes that "in all her novels [Smith] denounces the English property system whereby the elder son inherits everything, and the rest of the family becomes subservient to him" (325). Adolphus is one of these who becomes selfish and arrogant as a result of his position in the family.

Like Wollstonecraft, Smith believed that childhood training had a direct influence on adult life. In the novel, the characters of George and Adolphus reflect this belief. While George is clear-sighted and prudent, Adolphus'

"opinion of public affairs fluctuated ...as interest or caprice directed...Of principle of any kind he seemed entirely devoid, even on points where most men, however free in their opinions, have some degree of delicacy and sensibility" (I, 102). Adolphus cared only for himself, while George learned from his mother "that the feelings of others were to be consulted as well as his own" (I, 48). Such is the difference that a mother can make on her children.

Similarly, there is a marked contrast in the case of the young ladies who are both in love with George. Like Wollstonecraft, Hays, and Inchbald, Smith presents an alternative to the conventional portrait of the beautiful but frail and silly heroine. Though her female protagonist is not in any way as outspoken as Hays' Emma Courtney, for example, nevertheless, she attempts to create her own version of the "new" woman in Medora.

Medora's foil, Miss Goldthorp, "the only daughter of a deceased banker, and possessing above fifty thousand pounds" (I, 1), has had the upbringing of a typical spoiled heiress. While Medora has been under the care of her mother, Miss Goldthorp was "left an orphan at six years old, and educated at a boarding school without any particular attention" (I, 136). She "was very deeply read in romance and novels, by some one or other of the heroines of which she occasionally 'set her mind,' so that with a great versatility of character she rarely appeared in her own...she could never

divest herself of a sort of restless coquetry (I, 110-1).

Like the other romantic revolutionary writers, Smith is concerned with the system of education for women. Along with Wollstonecraft, she saw that the "arts" women were supposed to acquire were virtually useless. This belief is evident in her satiric description of Miss Goldthorp's skills:

Miss Goldthorp was one of those young women, of whom it is common to say, that they are 'highly accomplished;' that is, she had made some little progress in the various branches of female education, which usually pass under the name of elegant accomplishments. Conscious of knowing something, she assumed credit for a great deal...On the piano forte she was said to possess wonderful execution; and certain it is, that both on that and on the harp she made a very loud noise, and rattled away with the most perfect conviction that her auditors were amazed at her facility. She spoke French with the same undoubting confidence...she occasionally interlarded her conversation with words or short sentences in Italian, and had thence acquired the reputation of a very elegant Italian scholar
(I, 137-8).

In the novel, Smith proves that these feminine skills do not amount to much. Because she is so vain and such a coquet, Miss Goldthorp fails to distinguish between those who admire her and those who admire only her fortune. Hence, she is suitably wedded to Adolphus by the end of the novel.

Conversely, Medora, the child of nature, has acquired no artificial arts. As her future depends on the success of a lawsuit, her mother has instructed her "as that she may bear with an equal mind" either extreme wealth or extreme poverty (I, 224). Mrs. Glenmorris, her mother, explains her pedagogical beliefs:

"I should be sorry...that a daughter of mine, suffering her imagination to outrun her reason, should so bewilder herself among ideal beings as to become either useless or ridiculous; but if affection for merit, if admiration of talents, if the attachments of friendship are romantic; if it be romantic to dare to have an opinion of one's own, and not to follow one formal tract, wrong or right, pleasant or irksome, because our grandmothers and aunts have followed it before; if not to be romantic one must go through the world with prudery, carefully settling our blinkers at every step, as a cautious coachman hoodwinks his horses heads; if a woman, because she is a woman, must resign all pretensions to being a reasoning being, and dares neither look to the right nor to

the left, oh! may my Medora still be the child of nature and simplicity, still venture to express all she feels, even at the risk of being called a strange romantic girl" (II, 14-5).

Like the other romantic revolutionary writers, Smith was against women doing things merely because of tradition. She believed that women can think for themselves, be "reasoning beings," instead of creatures who merely follow customs or the wishes of men. Medora and her mother defy social customs when they invite George to their home without the presence of Mr. Glenmorris. At one point, they even consent to stay at George's house to save him the walk home in "the rigours of winter" (I, 271). As with the other writers, Smith stresses individual beliefs and standards of behaviour rather than those dictated by society.

Unlike Miss Goldthorp's feigned sentiments, Medora's "sensibility was not the exotic production of those forced and unnatural descriptions of tenderness; that are exhibited by the imaginary heroine of impossible adventures; it was the consequence of right and genuine feelings...that intuitive sense, by which she knew how to put herself, in imagination, in the place of another, and to feel for all who were unhappy, made her active in doing all the good that her age and situation admitted" (III, 38). Smith is convinced that education can make one a better person, one who can actively contribute to the general good of mankind.

Mrs. Glenmorris' advice to her daughter is one that the

author firmly believes in, that fortitude is desirable for both men and women. She tells Medora:

"It is not firmness,...that gives an unpleasant and unfeminine character to a woman; on the contrary, the mind which has acquired a certain degree of reliance on itself, which has learned to look on the good and evil of life, and to appreciate each, is alone capable of true gentleness and calmness....She who has learned to despise the trifling objects that make women who pursue them appear so contemptible to men; she who without neglecting her person has ornamented her mind, and not merely ornamented, but has discovered that nothing is good for any human being, whether men or woman, but a conscientious discharge of their duty; an humble trust that such a conduct will in any future state of existence secure more felicity than is attainable here; and an adherence to that pure morality, which says, Do what good you can to all; never wilfully injure any--these are the acquisitions that will give tranquility to the heart and courage to the actions, and even amidst the heaviest storms of fortune, bestow repose on their possessor"

(IV, 227-8).

For Smith then, women as well as men can have an effect in the world. The admirable woman is not one who is the most

ornamental or beautiful, but the one who has the firmness of mind to do her duty. The Young Philosopher shows that women as mothers, though restricted in their domestic spheres, have the power to bring about consequential and far-reaching changes in society.

Notes to Chapter V

¹ Jane Austen, "Catharine, or the Bower" (1792) in Minor Works, ed. R.W. Chapman, 199.

² Quoted in a letter of J.C. Walker to Bishop Percy, 16 September 1783 in John Nichols, Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century, vii (1848), 708, as noted by Anne Henry Ehrenpreis, "Introduction" to Emmeline, vii.

³ D'Arcy has been attributed to Smith by Hilbish and such standard sources as the Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature. But in his dissertation, Rufus Paul Turner shows that Smith in fact did not write this novel, 128-132.

⁴ Allene Gregory in The French Revolution and the English Novel and Florence Hilbish in her biography of Smith argue that Smith's three novels of propaganda represent three distinct stages in English revolutionism. Desmond (1792) is an ideal picture of what the Revolution should have been, The Banished Man (1794) reveals what it was, and The Young Philosopher (1798) looks back over the past and evolves its causes (Hilbish, 298-9, Gregory, 221).

⁵ The celebrated English critic, George Stevens, severely censured Smith for her choice of an immoral work. He believed that the passion in Manon Lescaut was an apology for licentiousness and ought to be condemned. As a result

of this outcry Smith withdrew the work. (Hilbish, 118-9).

⁶ Imaginative Biography, (1834) II, 95-6, as quoted by Anne Henry Ehrenpreis, "Introduction" to Northanger Abbey by Jane Austen (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972) 14.

⁷ English Women of Letters (1862), as quoted by Tompkins, 143.

⁸ Anna Seward, Letter 38 to Rev.--Berwick, dated October 6, 1788, in Letters of Anna Seward; Written Between the Years 1734-1807 (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, 1811), as cited by Hilbish, 242.

⁹ Sir Walter Scott, The Journal of Sir Walter Scott (Edinburgh, 1891) I, 156, as quoted by Rufus P. Turner, Charlotte Smith (1749-1806) 118.

¹⁰ While it is true that Henry Fielding had written about a married heroine in Amelia (1751), the plot was still a novelty by the late eighteenth century. More typical of the couples in the 1790s are the ones in Smith's Emmeline, Burney's Camilla (1796), and Austen's Pride and Prejudice (1813).

¹¹ Pinney, Essays of George Eliot, 302-3, as quoted by Bowstead, "Epistolary Novel," 252.

¹² As quoted by Turner, 147.

Conclusion

the burden and the complexity of womanhood were not enough; she must reach beyond the sanctuary and pluck for herself the strange bright fruits of art and knowledge. Claspng them as few women have ever clasped them, she would not renounce her own inheritance--the difference of view, the difference of standard...

Virginia Woolf on 'George Eliot' in The Common Reader

Though Woolf was not writing about the five women in this study, her comments on George Eliot could just as easily apply to them. In the course of this work, I have tried to show that one of the most important contributions of these female writers to literary history was what Woolf calls "the difference of view, the difference of standard." This difference distinguishes these women not only from the canon of eighteenth century novelists who were predominantly male, but also from many other female scribblers of sentimental romances.

As I have pointed out in various places, the three

major divergences from traditional texts are in the resolution of the narrative, the expression of the female experience, and the feminization of the focus or concern of the fiction. First, almost all of the novels examined conclude with an ending that is a departure, in some cases albeit slight, from the conventional happy ending of the courtship novel. Wollstonecraft finishes both Mary and The Wrongs of Woman with the heroine alone, troubled and contemplative. Hays' Emma, in The Memoirs of Emma Courtney, devotes the remainder of her life to the rearing of the child Augustus. Similarly, Helen Maria Williams' Julia finds consolation in religion and virtue, in helping her cousin Charlotte with the care of her child. Though both Inchbald's A Simple Story and Nature and Art end in marriage, it is the union not of the original hero and heroine found at the beginning of the story, but the coupling of their offspring, who seem to have atoned for their parents' mistakes. Finally in Smith's Emmeline, in Desmond, and in The Young Philosopher, the nuptials of the male and female protagonists are set against a backdrop of failed marriages, of stories of unhappy couples.

What is significant about all these conclusions is that they show the novelists' desire to make their novels reflect their experience more closely. These writers saw and portrayed life as a continuum which did not freeze at the climactic moment of marriage, nor even at the death of one's lover or husband. In general, they sacrifice the aesthetic

closure of narrative and the imaginative gratification of romantic love for a socially realistic fiction. As women they shared the knowledge that matrimony, often viewed in fiction as the solution to a young girl's problems, was in daily life only the beginning of a whole new set of difficulties. Domestic life, then, in their works, is depicted not in rosy hues, but in more somber and serious ways. After all; their aim in writing these novels was not primarily entertainment but instruction.

Mary Poovey believes that in other novels the artistic closure of narrative and the gratification of romantic love are compensations for the more practical rewards of bourgeois ideology. She explains the reason why women writers at the turn of the century deliberately did not end their fictions this way:

The practical problem with these compensatory, substitute gratifications is that, no matter how imaginatively satisfying they are, they finally prove debilitating to their real adherents; to put it simply, they deflect criticism from the social institutions they ultimately serve. As Mary Wollstonecraft recognized, sentimentalism purports to gratify the senses it inflames by offering first vicarious titillation and then the ennobling reward of spiritual transcendence. Yet because of the position and definition of women in bourgeois society, the actual rewards of sentimen-

talism prove meager and false, consisting, as they do, of extreme susceptibility to every passing emotion, cultivated helplessness, and even sexual frustration. Romantic love similarly promises women emotional fulfillment and the legitimation of their autonomy, their intensity of feeling, and even their power; but, given the actual power relations institutionalized in society, such rewards are short-lived. Romantic love makes women dream of being swept off their feet; it ends by reinforcing the helplessness that makes learning to stand on their own two feet unlikely. (Proper Lady, 243)

Hence most of the novels we have been examining leave the reader, if not dissatisfied, slightly uncomfortable with the conclusion of the story. As in their own lives, not all the problems raised in their fiction are resolved by the last chapter, not all the loose ends are neatly or artificially tied up. It would be safe to say that in general, the group of women novelists examined here are more concerned with disillusionment, rather than idealistic or imaginative fulfillment, as a pervading theme in their work.

While it is true that ending with disillusionment or disenchantment with the kinds of rewards life has to offer does not provide a positive example to female readers, it is a necessary first step towards the recognition of the insufficiency of traditional expectations of woman in middle class society. That Wollstonecraft's Mary and Maria's

search for self-esteem and identity ends in frustration, that Hays' Emma Courtney is unable to find a suitable occupation to support herself, and that there is no place for Inchbald's sprightly and willful Miss Milner within the structure of eighteenth-century patriarchy are some indications of the kinds of limitations that women face in society. These writers, then, though they do not always provide adequate solutions to the problems, nevertheless succeeded in articulating this aspect of female experience. Through their fiction, they demonstrated that women's access to culture and to certain parts of social life were very much restricted.

In addition, these novelists questioned values traditionally viewed as important for women. Wollstonecraft's Mary and Maria, and some of Smith's minor characters such as Lady Adelina and Madame de Boisbelle undermine the meaning of words such as virtue and chastity. They pointed out that virtue was not necessarily linked to a woman's sexual purity. Other feminine virtues such as delicacy and softness are also re-examined. Hays, Williams, Inchbald, and Smith showed that these traits were often artfully feigned in aristocratic ladies. Instead of cultivating this kind of false sensibility, they advocated moral and intellectual fortitude in women.

Often, these writers reconstructed the ideal heroine in their fiction by either creating one who was unlike the typical docile, submissive girl of the circulating library romances, or by showing how the outspoken, rebellious heroines are ultimately rejected by society.

Wollstonecraft's Mary and Maria, Hays' Emma, and Inchbald's Miss Milner try to live by their own feelings of right and wrong, and consequently suffer from their actions. Many of Smith's female characters do not speak out or rebel outwardly, but through their miserable lives become testimonies to the fact that women are the most frequent victims of male tyranny.

These authors set their own standard of values based on their intelligence and experience. There was no longer an unquestioned acceptance of paternalistic alliances of responsibilities and duties. Instead the emphasis was on the individual's responses to society and to male-dominated ideology. Thus, writers like Wollstonecraft and Smith who had had negative experiences with their husbands or lovers in their own lives, could not extol without qualification the virtues of domestic life, nor agree with traditional beliefs that the man of the family was necessarily the best suited to be in charge of the household. Their novels show that this arrangement in fact could sometimes lead to economic as well as emotional adversity in the family.

In addition to challenging paternalistic values, these women redefined women's desires and inclinations. The

novels of Wollstonecraft and Hays, in particular, attested to the fact that women had other needs in life besides that of romantic fulfillment from a male partner. As heroines, Mary, Maria, and Emma Courtney demonstrated the female's propensity to education and the need to acquire knowledge. Each of these heroines displays intellectual energy, sensitivity, and moral strength. They show that a woman's character can develop without depending on the conventional romantic involvement with a man.

Related to this inquiry into the values in these texts written by women is the difference in the dialectical concerns of the novels. Though these authors did not use such twentieth-century terms as "equality of the sexes," many of their complaints against the contemporary system were, in fact, similar to modern feminist ideology. Several heroines ask to be treated as human beings rather than as females. Writers such as Wollstonecraft, Hays, Smith, and to some extent Inchbald wished to see male and female children treated in the same manner. They advocated the development of reason and moral values rather than external beauty and artificial ornament in young ladies. Frequently, therefore, their novels dealt with questions of education and pedagogy.

What is significant in their criticism of traditional pedagogy for girls is the realization that the problem lay not in the nature or character of women but in the kind of education and training they received. Inchbald, Wollstonecraft, and Smith showed that women were not

naturally frivolous or incapable of thought, but were encouraged to develop trivial arts and coquettish conduct, and at the same time were denied the opportunity to improve their ability to think and reason. Hays' Emma Courtney demonstrated that a woman who had been taught philosophy, sciences, and literature, who had been instructed to investigate every opinion and exercise her understanding was, in fact, not welcomed in society. Emma ends up isolated and alienated from her friends and the community at large.

In most of these novels the story is told from the woman's point of view. Though by the 1790s a feminine perspective was certainly not new, one can detect a slight difference in nuance, in tone and voice, between these works and the feminocentric novels written by male authors in the first half of the century. When the heroines of these romantic revolutionary novels plead for the privilege of intellectual improvement, for the right to judge what is best for themselves, or for freedom from a tyrannical spouse, there is a quality of urgency in their appeal often springing from the authors' personal experience. In general, this sense of immediacy is more difficult to find in the fiction written by men.

As well, the exception of Richardson notwithstanding, the focus of the works is shifted, for the most part, from outdoor, adventurous, unusual occurrences to sedentary, quotidian, domestic concerns. The novels deal not so much

with rape, intrigues, or extraordinary events in the city, as with everyday female difficulties. The problem of managing a household under financial distress, for example, is handled by Wollstonecraft and Smith. Williams and, to some extent, Hays attempt to come to terms with the sanctity of familial relationships, and many of the novelists write about the complicated task of rearing and raising children. Again, one gets a sense that these authors are not simply recording these problems with detachment or observing from a distance, but very much addressing the issues from first-hand experience.

Finally, in terms of aesthetic accomplishments, these women novelists of the 1790s captured the feminist revolutionary spirit of the decade in the form of fiction. They have articulated their sense of alienation, oppression and desire, using the novel as a means and opportunity of self-expression. In their lives as well as in their artistic creations, they showed the possibilities of the individual's challenging patriarchal and social institutions. Refusing to blindly follow the dominant ideology, they integrated their intelligence and experience, their reason and suffering, their scepticism and their vision, to challenge that ideology, and to assert the need for change.

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